# Weird Tales

*The Unique Magazine*

ALL STORIES COMPLETE

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Over 600,000 SOLD!

# I Showed my Old Boss a Mistake of $7.10 and Made Myself $1.38



I'D BEEN working as a plumber's assistant. Got let out and tramped the streets for two months looking for a job. I finally saw an advertisement about the big money to be made selling Ve-Po-Ad, a vest pocket Adding Machine.

I wrote for their FREE TRIAL OFFER to agents; got all the dope; and started out. I called on my old boss first.

I said to him: "Here's something you can use in figuring estimates and making out bills. It fits right in your vest pocket. It will add, subtract, multiply or divide. It will do anything a $300 adding machine will do. It will save you money. It'll cost you $2.50."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the boss, "I can figure better with a pencil than that toy you've got there can figure."

I picked up a sheet of paper filled with figures. "Come on, let's go on this bill you're sending out," I said.

He started to work with his pencil. I used my demonstrator Ve-Po-Ad. I could have figured up to a billion dollars and still had time to wait for him. When he finally finished, there was a difference of $7.10 in his figures and mine.

I checked his figures *with a pencil*. Ve-Po-Ad was *right*. I saved the boss $7.10. He paid me $2,50 for a Ve-Po-Ad—and I made $1.38 clear!

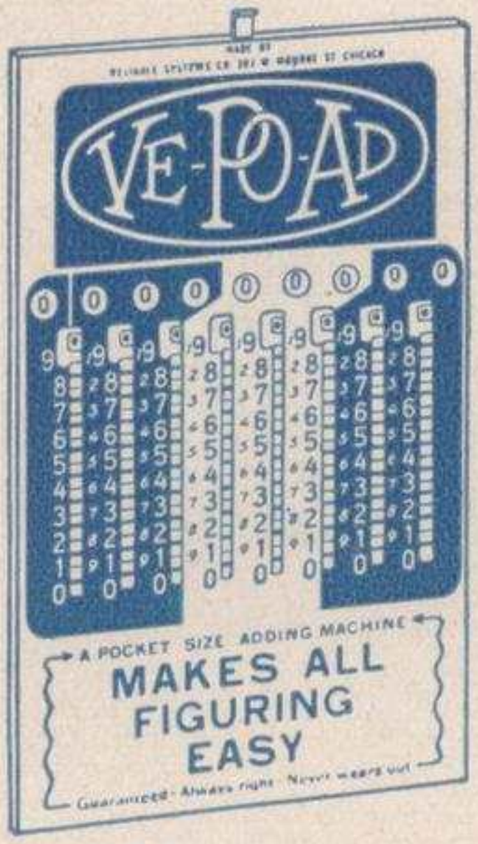
## I've Made $75 a Week Easily

I never sold anything in my life before. I've found that all I have to do is show Ve-Po-Ad to a business man; a storekeeper; a housewife. It sells itself. Whenever I pull this accurate little adding machine out of my vest pocket, it attracts attention. It's not a toy. It's a dyed-in-the-wool adding machine so small that it fits in your vest pocket.

## Here's What It Is

VE-PO-AD is the most amazing invention you've ever seen. It is a complete and accurate adding machine that measures 4¾ inches in length; is 3 inches wide; and ⅛ inch thick.

VE-PO-AD operates like lightning. Quickly, conveniently, accurately—it shows visible results up to 999,999,999. It is so simple that the smallest child can operate it—yet so perfect that it will amaze the biggest of business and professional men.




## YOU Can Make BIG Money

Think what the field is. Everybody who uses figures is your prospect — storekeepers, merchants, farmers, doctors, lawyers, housewives—anybody. The appeal is universal. You don't have to be a star salesman—or even have sales experience—to sell VE-PO-AD and make BIG MONEY. Show it. Demonstrate it. We'll gladly supply you with sales manual, free circulars and all advertising and sales matter necessary to help you cash in on the biggest little agents' "natural" in 25 years.

## 100 Per Cent Profit For You

VE-PO-AD sells for only $2.50. You make $1.38—better than 100%. And that profit goes on EVERY SALE. The average sale takes not more than 12½ minutes. Usually less. Figure what you can make PART TIME OR WHOLE TIME.

## FREE TRIAL OFFER

In order that you may see for yourself what a tremendous money-maker this amazing Vest Pocket Adding Machine is—send at once for the special FREE TRIAL Offer to Agents. Do it TODAY. Investigate thoroughly the absolutely unlimited field for money-making VE-PO-AD brings you. Write at once without obligation—so you can get started toward BIG MONEY.

# C. M. CLEARY

Dept. 81A 303 W. Madison St. CHICAGO

**WRITE NOW**

# $16 the first night ..for playing!

MOST of the world **works** for a living—works hard, too. But that doesn't mean **you** have to. Why not **play** for a living? Do something you like to do, and make it pay you big money. Plenty of men and women who had a hard time to get along six months ago—are now making from $50 to $100 a week—playing their Hawaiian Guitars. And they didn't know how to read a single note of music when they came to me.

## America's Most Popular Music

The haunting, soft, melodious strumming of the Hawaiian Guitar is America's most popular music. Everywhere orchestras are looking for men and women who can play the Hawaiian Guitar. Everywhere those who have mastered the Hawaiian Guitar are getting paid more and more money. Roy Reikane writes in, "I have made $200 extra money in 6 weeks playing my Hawaiian Guitar." Carlton E. Scarbro recently wrote me, "I have made $1,000 since I took your course." Granville Smith writes, "I make $8 a night and play only 4 hours."



*One of the Dozens of Photo helps sent with each Course*

*Hundreds of such letters have come in. But let me tell you about my short-cut to good times and big pay—my simplified method of learning to play the Hawaiian Guitar at home in a few weeks. A new method—so easy to understand—so much fun to learn—that even a child can pick it up. (We have successfully taught children only 8 years of age.)*

## Pictures Instead of Words, Teach You

I don't care if you have never read a note in your life, or even know what a Hawaiian Guitar looks like. All I ask is that you **like** music. My methods are so clear and easy to understand that you will actually play a real melody after the very first lesson. Sounds uncanny, doesn't it? Here's how I do it.

With your lessons I send dozens of photographs showing just how to place your fingers, how to strum the strings. My Kno-All and Master charts teach you to read notes almost automatically. It's as simple as learning your A B C's over again. Some of our students become finished musicians the first month, others take a little longer, but they all learn with surprising speed.

## Lonesome? It's a Sure Cure!

Once you have mastered the Hawaiian Guitar, the world lies waiting at your feet. You can travel anywhere, meet the best people, live in real style and comfort, and gain a host of friends. All this is yours, waiting for you, if you are willing to spend a few minutes a day with me for a few short weeks.



## We Send You Regular Phonograph Records of Every Piece in the Course

And we don't miss a single bet. To make sure that you can't go wrong, we send you a whole set of regular phonograph records, on which is recorded every melody you learn to play while taking the course. These aid you to correct minor mistakes, and assure you of perfect technique. With these records to guide you—the tiniest error in your playing is quickly corrected. These records come absolutely free with the course and are an excellent addition to your home music as well.




## This is what Prutzman Did

"A friend asked me if I could play the Hawaiian Guitar. I told him I'd only been playing for a few weeks, but he said, 'Come along anyway, and play at the dance.' I made out very well, and was paid $16 for my first night's work. And I see more opportunities ahead."—RALPH PRUTZMAN, Lehighton, Pa.

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# Weird Tales

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VOLUME XVII — NUMBER 3





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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.



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# THE EYRIE



OUR announcement that WEIRD TALES would henceforth be published bi-monthly instead of monthly has evoked a chorus of protest from you, the readers. These range all the way from sorrowful expressions of regret to indignant outbursts and even threats. By mail, by telephone and by telegraph these protests have poured in, demanding to know whether we have taken leave of our senses, that we should even dream of making the readers wait two months between issues. We never knew before how many thousands of enthusiastic admirers we have. We yield, we capitulate, we surrender to your insistence. Beginning with the next issue, which will go on sale June 1, WEIRD TALES will again be published regularly every month. All we ask is that you keep up your loyal interest in the magazine; and we, on our part, will continue to publish a unique magazine, filled from cover to cover with superb stories of a type that you can not find in any other periodical, a magazine well worth your enthusiastic support.

There is a marvelous feast of fascinating stories for you in forthcoming issues. H. P. Lovecraft's long story, *The Whisperer in Darkness,* full of eery whispers and shadows of cosmic evil from Outside, strikes a new note of weirdness, and will give you many a shudder. It will be published soon. Seabury Quinn has depicted the temperamental little French occultist, Jules de Grandin, in the eeriest of his adventures in a powerful long story of breath-taking interest, involving Black Magic and the resurrection of buried corpses. This story, *Satan's Stepson,* will also be published soon. A spectacular treat will be provided for you by Otis Adelbert Kline, whose novel, *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* uses the very gods of India as actors in a thrilling drama of utter weirdness. You will be glad to know that Robert E. Howard has written for you several new adventures of that striking Puritan figure, Solomon Kane. Clark Ashton Smith has written a number of stories to appear in forthcoming issues, and if you have read *A Rendezvous in Averoigne* in this issue you will eagerly await more of Mr. Smith's inimitable stories. In our next issue Doctor David H. Keller has a story of man-eating orchids that contains as dramatic a situation as can be found in literature. Those of you who like weird-scientific stories will be glad to know that many more of Edmond Hamilton's tales of the interstellar patrol will be printed in this magazine. And Everil Worrell has written for you a story that out-Einsteins Einstein in the daring of its science—a marvelous tale of a voyage to the limits of our solar system and back *in an open airplane!* You can not afford to miss even a single issue.

"It is with lachrymal lament that we readers learn that no more shall WEIRD TALES

*(Please turn to page 294)*

# YOUR REAL SELF *Unveiled Truthfully*



# I Can Tell You Surprising Things

IF I could talk to you, confidentially, for just a few minutes, I could tell you things about yourself that would surprise you. I would quickly and easily point out how you can master the obstacles that now stand between you and the success you wish to attain, and show you how there is a mysterious power and unlimited creative force in your own being that will enable you to rise to heights unsuspected by you.

You want to know more than WHAT you MAY accomplish in the future, or what life holds for you as glorious possibilities. You want to know HOW to bring them into realization. You want to know WHAT to do to change the course of your present life and begin a new career leading to success and real mastership. I offer you the valuable and universally recognized help of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. In a sincere spirit of brotherly co-operation, I extend to you the advice, guidance, help, and sympathetic understanding of the master minds of all the ages who have focalized and reduced their marvelous knowledge into one definite system of Self-Revelation, which will be like a magic mirror to you, and in which you can see reflected your real self and the real possibilities that lie in your future.

# Let Me Send You This Free Book

To prove to you the broad, beautiful, humanitarian spirit of the Rosicrucian revelations, let me send you without any obligation a copy of the new, private book entitled "The Light of Egypt." In it you will find a sample lesson containing the fascinating revelations of the Rosicrucian teachings and an outline of how you may begin at once to know your real self and take advantage of the possibilities that lie before you. Each page of this book will surprise you and hold you in its fascinating spell like a story from the lives of the MAGI OF THE EAST. You will quickly realize why no other organization known to man has done so much to help men and women to understand and awaken the real powerful self within as the Rosicrucian Fraternity. Write for a copy of this book now while you think of it. Send the coupon below:

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Please send me without obligation a free copy of "The Light of Egypt," and sample lesson. I am really sincere.

Name_____

Address_____

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be issued monthly, but bi-monthly," writes Robert W. Nelson, of St. Charles, Illinois, in a letter to the Eyrie. "We have the right to expect in each bi-monthly issue a fascinating de Grandin novelette, a smashing, powerful and beautiful novelette by Robert E. Howard, and a weird-scientific novelette by Edmond Hamilton. Granting that Seabury Quinn is one of your best scribes, Robert E. Howard, in my opinion, is the foremost. His *Kings of the Night* was the best story I have read since beginning to read WEIRD TALES, which is about two years ago. Its smashing, powerful, beautiful weirdness and dramatic intensity gripped me. We readers wish more stories of this type from this distinguished writer. Edmond Hamilton deserves more praise than he is receiving. His *Pigmy Island* was one of the best stories I have read in the most unique of all magazines, WEIRD TALES. Let's keep the latter unique and weird, and make all efforts to restore its former status—that of a monthly magazine."

Writes Bernie Willbanks, of West Monroe, Louisiana: "I like Robert E. Howard best of all your authors, and you have some fine writers. I have never read a story that appealed to me like *Skull-face*. Please give us many more of Mr. Howard's stories. Seabury Quinn is fine, though I should hate to live in Harrisonville. I'll bet the inhabitants never get any sleep, but stay awake all the time to scare away the spooks. Edmond Hamilton is good, though his stories all have the same general plot. I have a kick about your illustrations. They are mostly sexual, though the stories themselves are clean. I am not a reformer, but just wanted to get that off my mind. Keep on printing Howard and Quinn and I will stay with you till the cows come home."

A letter from Mrs. Amos Lockard, of Columbia, Pennsylvania, says: "I am sending the slip telling the stories I like best in the current issue of WEIRD TALES. It is hard to choose the best, as they are all excellent. The only kick I've got to make is against the two months' wait between issues. Why, oh why, must you cut it down from the monthly issue? It is too long to wait just from one month to another. I'd prefer it twice a month. Can't you do something about it, please?"

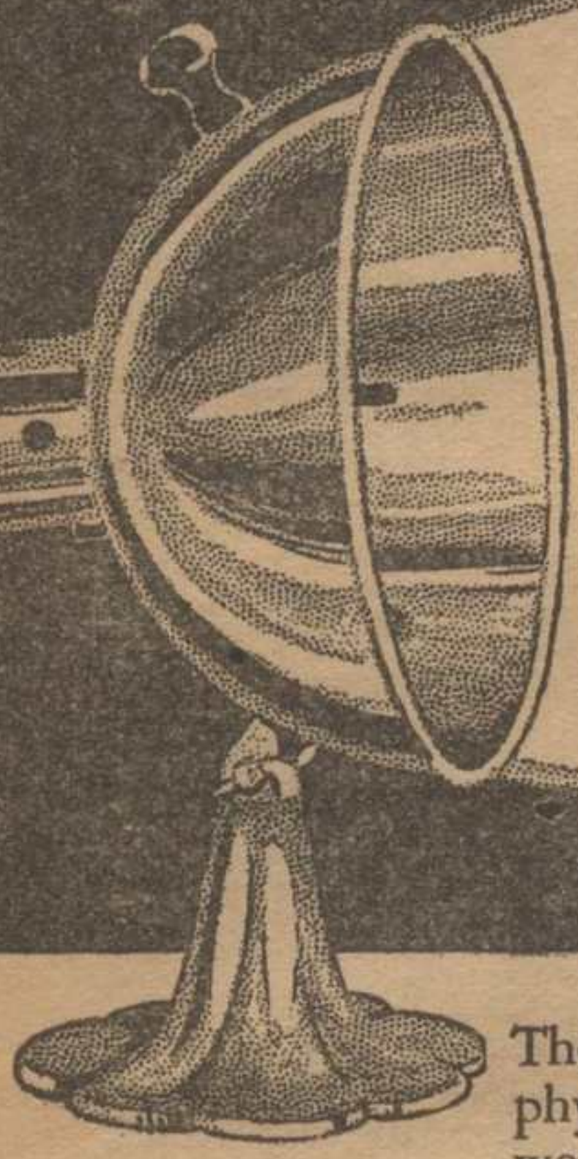
From Penang, in the Straits Settlements, Nim Keng Eok writes to the Eyrie: "Your magazine is thoroughly A-1 in my register of English and foreign literature, and I've been reading it since I don't know when. The one writer in it who is most consistently good is Seabury Quinn. How he can write such 'pakka' stories every time he alone, I suppose, knows. Jules, Trowbridge and Quinn—these are the trio that hold me to WEIRD TALES. Jules is another Sherlock Holmes! Why not perpetuate him by reprinting his adventures in book form? I am sure they would sell like hot cakes."

A letter from J. E. Roper, of East St. Louis, Illinois, says: "I take this chance to tell you that I have been a steady reader of your magazine for the past three years and can say truthfully that it is one of the most absorbing and altogether interesting works of its kind on the market at the present time. Regarding its authors, I believe that Lovecraft heads the list, Kline second, and Howard third. I have read other works of all three authors and can say only good of them all."

"WEIRD TALES is so interesting that I read and re-read the index like a child," writes Kadra Maysi, "unable to decide which of my favorites I will turn to first. I

*(Please turn to page 296)*

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# .... NOW

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Without obligation to me, kindly send me full particulars regarding your FREE DEMONSTRATOR OFFER on the New Solray Health Lamp selling for $12.50.

Name_____

Address_____ City_____ State_____

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adore stories of other planets when the planets, life upon them, customs, etc., are described; because I believe them to be inhabited by organisms adapted to their atmosphere (or lack of it), climate, temperature. As I am utterly dumb about machinery, I do not always appreciate the interstellar and advanced aviation stories—but I do enjoy them. I think my favorites are the Jules de Grandin series and all other stories of magic, voodoo, werewolves, and that kind of stuff. Frank B. Long, Jr., shows wonderful thought and research in his work. He must be brilliant. Jane Scales' story is both dramatic and well written. I only wish you published semi-monthly instead of bi-."

Writes Emily Wolff, of Peoria, Illinois: "I want you to know how much my brothers and sisters and I liked this February number, and especially the story called *The Picture*. It seemed so *real*—you didn't need to pretend while you were reading it. It was blood-curdling, too, especially where the tramp was conjuring up this terrible devil and then again where the devil comes back and claims his part of the bargain. I am glad the man gave up his riches rather than let the woman be tortured. I wish Mr. Flagg would write some more stories like this one."

"It seems to me that Seabury Quinn's *Ghost-Helper* is a short story of exceptional merit," writes Ralph M. Melster, of Washington, D. C. "I wished to express my pleasure in it without undertaking the discrimination involved in your printed coupon or ballot. Just a cumulative vote for Quinn and a pat on the back for his distinguished colleagues in the sanctum and on the staff of WEIRD TALES."

William P. Brewster, of Houston, Texas, writes: "Along with the rest of your correspondents who write to the Eyrie, I will agree that Seabury Quinn is a very good writer and I always enjoy his stories (with one exception: *The House of the Golden Masks)*. But listen! You receive letters every month from readers, and, according to your own statements in the Eyrie, you are arranging and publishing your magazine according to the tastes of those whose replies you receive. And the voting coupon! Why don't you attach a two-cent stamp to it and still see how many replies you get? Now, your magazine, or any other magazine (no exceptions), will fail if it depends on its 'fanatical' readers for guidance; and those are the only ones who write you. (Please overlook the illogic of this letter; remember this is after at least six years.) Remember, you have to cater to the casual reader. Your 'fanatics' will buy anyway."

Ben Belitt, of University, Virginia, writes: "The February issue is replete with many really fine pieces of work; there was not one that I did not read with interest and a very real suspense. Mr. Whitehead's *The Tree-Man* was a bit of craftsmanlike and fascinating writing; Mr. Whitehead is probably the most consistently excellent author appearing in W. T. Mr. Long's *Horror from the Hills* would be my next vote; he has presented a difficult situation lucidly and powerfully. *The Picture* and *The Thing in the Bush* both contain much skilful work; and I was particularly delighted to renew an old friendship in de Maupassant's *On the River.*"

"Congratulations on the February-March WEIRD TALES, which is truly a most excellent number," writes Clark Ashton Smith from his home in Auburn, California. "*The Horror from the Hills* is a tremendous thing, and easily deserves first place.

*(Please turn to page 298)*



# there clawing frantically was . . . "the THING"!

ONLY a moment before, in the dead of night, she had been awakened by a strange scraping noise. Her heart thumping wildly she looked fearfully around the room, but at first could see nothing. Suddenly her heart stopped beating—for there at the window was the THING—awful, inhuman, its two hands clawing frantically at the glass!

She shook in terror—for she knew only too well what had happened to others! Now *she* was at its mercy!

What, indeed, was this weird thing of evil? What was its uncanny power? What awful fate lay ahead of this beautiful girl, alone and unprotected?

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(5% off for cash) *Age: Over 21?* ..... *Under 21?* .....

*(Continued from page 296)*

*The Tree-Man* and *The Picture* are both fine work, too. And the new illustrations, taking them by and large, are the most satisfactory that I have seen in W. T."

Writes Mrs. Maude K. Spangler, of Kansas City, Missouri, in a letter to the Eyrie: "I do not think I have ever missed a copy of WEIRD TALES since the first issue. Yes: do keep WEIRD TALES weird. I like good ghost stories and ancient superstitions, but not any interplanetary stories; we have so much of those in other magazines. I like Seabury Quinn's stories, but I wish just once the doctor could best the old Frenchman. Do not give us so many scientific stories—so many do not understand science enough to enjoy them. Anyhow, it is a blamed good magazine, and I hope never to miss a copy."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular tale in the February-March issue, as shown by your votes, was *The Tree-Man,* by Henry S. Whitehead, closely followed by Francis Flagg's story, *The Picture.*

Allan Farwell, of Chicago, writes to the Eyrie: "As a reader of WEIRD TALES for eight years, I hastened to obtain copies of ORIENTAL STORIES when I found it was published by the same firm that prints WEIRD TALES. I have read the first three issues, and I want to say that it is my favorite of all adventure magazines published today. The stories held me breathless, and each one seemed written by a master of his craft. Never have I read a story that took hold of me as strongly as *Della Wu, Chinese Courtezan,* in the current issue of ORIENTAL STORIES. My two favorite magazines are WEIRD TALES and ORIENTAL STORIES."

"I have been reading your magazine for the last four years," writes H. L. Harmon of Buffalo, Oklahoma, "and I have every copy published in that time. I think Seabury Quinn is the best writer you have ever published. Why don't you put out a volume of just his works alone? I think it would go over in a big way. But why in the name of Gunga Din must you publish it only once in two months? I think you should print it twice a month instead of cutting it down. It's going to be a long wait between issues."

A letter from J. H. Zichterman, of Chicago, says: "I have just completed reading my first copy of WEIRD TALES, and am enclosing my vote for the best stories. I think that *The Horror City,* by Edmond Hamilton, is one of the best stories that I have ever read anywhere. Jules de Grandin was also very fine."

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*(Please turn to page 300)*

She changed Places with Her Husband's Sweetheart — and won back his Love!




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*(Continued from page 298)*

of the interstellar patrol; astronomical tales that bring to you the most daring prognostications of stellar science.

The bulk of our stories, however, will be tales of utter weirdness, for it is upon these that the splendid reputation of the magazine has been built. Such tales, for instance, as the stories of cosmic horror penned by H. P. Lovecraft, to mention one of the most popular writers in this magazine; the eery adventures of Jules de Grandin, as told in Seabury Quinn's inimitable style; shuddery werewolf stories (you all remember *The Werewolf of Ponkert,* by H. Warner Munn, do you not?); tales of the unnatural and abnormal; fantastic and bizarre stories such as Frank Owen's unforgettable tale, *The Wind That Tramps the World;* tales of vampires and witches; thrilling stories of devil-worship, of which E. Hoffmann Price is a master narrator; occasional ghost stories; tales of strange monsters, such as the ever-to-be-remembered story by Frank Belknap Long, Jr., entitled *The Space-Eaters;* thrill-tales of mystery and terror; tales of stark horror, but nothing sickening or disgusting.

We could dwell at length on some of the great stories we have published in the past; but we think it better to continue publishing the finest weird fiction in the world today, rather than harp on the past glories of the magazine.

Let us hear from you, for this is your magazine, and your co-operation and criticism will help us to choose the kind of stories that you like best.

Our sister magazine, ORIENTAL STORIES, will contain an entirely different type of stories from those in WEIRD TALES. It will be largely devoted to vivid action-adventure tales, and will also contain burning love stories of the Orient. Many of the authors who have given WEIRD TALES its fame will appear in ORIENTAL STORIES. Among these are E. Hoffmann Price, Robert E. Howard, Otis Adelbert Kline, Frank Owen, and Frank Belknap Long, Jr. If you want thrilling stories expressing the glamor and mystery of the East, you will like this magazine, which is printed by the publishers of WEIRD TALES.

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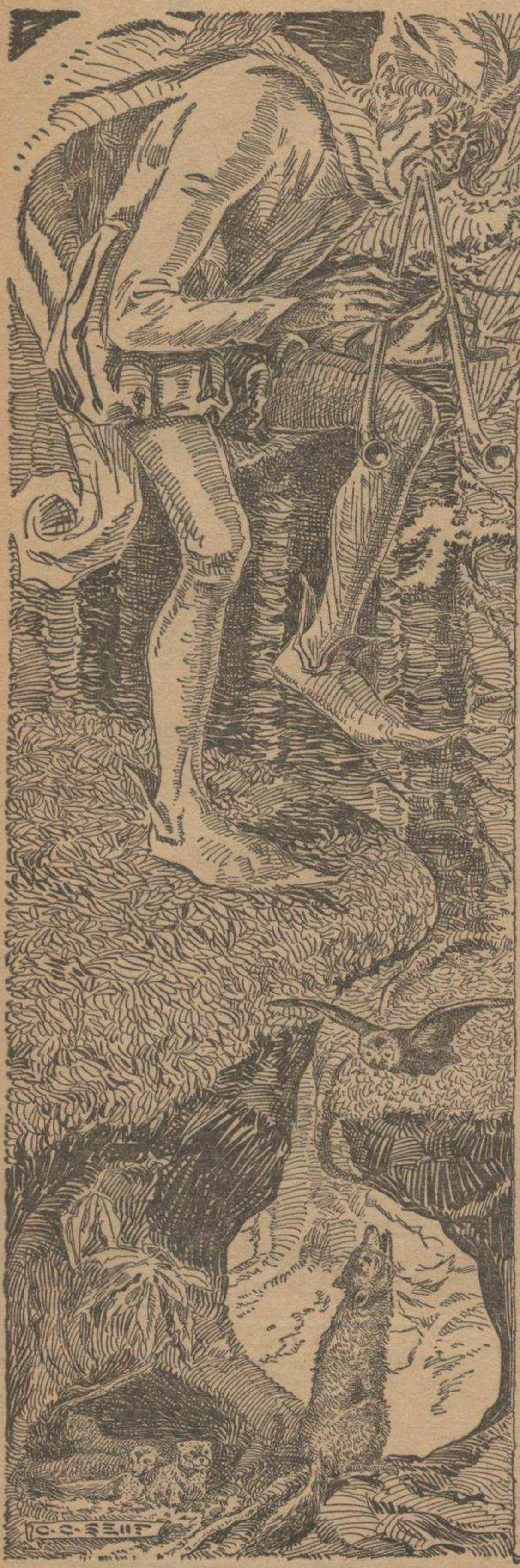
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# The Piper of the Pines

by MARJORIE HOLMES

Oh slim, shrill piper
Playing to the pines,
Drunk on autumn liquor,
Drunk on purple wines,
Mimicking the wind-song
On your magic flute,
In your forest medley
Hear the owls hoot,
Hear the wolf-pups whimper,
And the coyotes cry,
In the awful answer
Hear the eagle die!

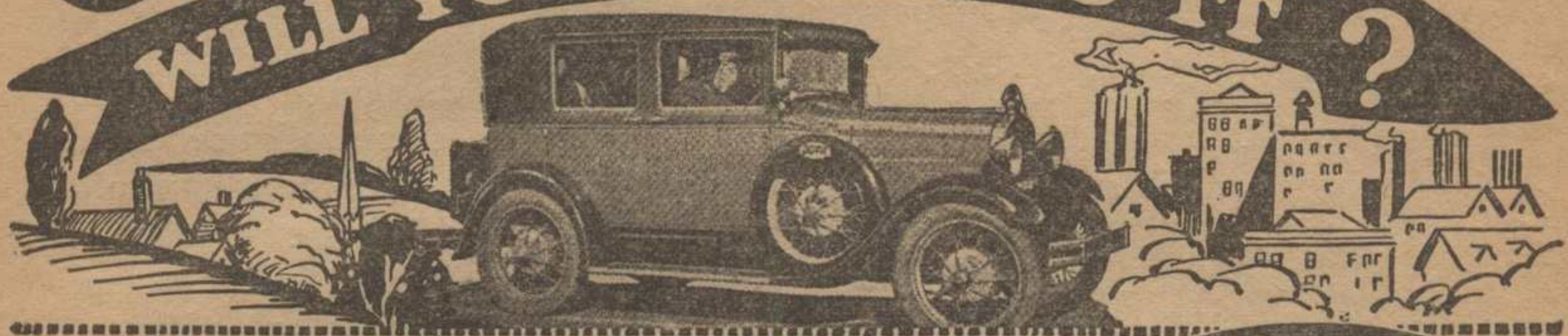
Weird, gay piper,
In the garb of green,
Grinning, grimly grinning,
Lank and loose and lean. . . .
Oh piper, fling your pipes away,
Piper, hush! No longer play,
For I loathe your music shrill—
Maddened piper on the hill.

* * * * *

See him peek beneath the trees,
See him hop about, and then
Hear him, laughing in the breeze,
Lift his pipes and play again!

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| Chevrolet .....42 | Ford A.....61 | Oakland .....32 | Studebaker .....32 |
| Chrysler .....31 | Hudson .....31 | Oldsmobile .....43 | Whippet .....35 |
| De Soto .....26 | Hupmobile .....34 | Packard .....21 | Willys-Knight .....34 |
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# Ten Million Years Ahead

## *By* EDMOND HAMILTON

*A startling story of what this world will be like ten million years from now when plants rule instead of men*

"I MEAN just that," said Norton quietly. "Ten million years."

Fairley and I stared unbelievingly at our friend. We three sat in the long, roughly furnished living-room of an old farmhouse, lit by shaded electrics. The only sound for a moment was that of the night breeze outside sighing through the branches of the trees. It was Fairley who at last broke the silence.

"Ten million years!" he repeated. "Norton, you can't be serious!"

"I was never more serious in my life," Norton quietly affirmed.

"But it's crazy—impossible!" I burst out. "All these theories about time are all right, but to try to put them into practise——"

"Only an insane man would think of it," Fairley finished for me. "Norton, you've not been working up here on a thing like that?"

"On just that," Norton replied. "And before you and Olcott get so positive about it, let me tell you what I've done.

"You both know how interested I became back at the university in the subject of time. It was the one thing in physical science that fascinated me. I spent most of my spare hours working out the theories and repeating the observations of De Sitter and Einstein and the rest, and when I left the university four years ago I determined that I, Harris Norton, was going to know more about time than any one else on earth.

"So I came up to this old Connecticut farmhouse I'd inherited and had it fixed over with workshop and living-quarters. In the four years since then I've lived alone here and I've worked like—well, I've worked. In that workshop there I've carried out experiments that would have blasted half the fabric of accepted science if I'd made them public. And I've come at last to know, as I planned, more about time than any one else.

"Time is a dimension, just as length and breadth and thickness are dimensions. That is a commonplace of physical science, nowadays. We know that matter moves along this time-dimension from the past toward the future at an unchangeable speed, like a locomotive following its track. We can not speed up our movement on that track, or reverse it, or stop or even slow it, but move forward always at the same rate.

"But suppose that this time-track we follow doubled back upon itself so that a point really far ahead of us on it would be close beside us in reality, just as a railway track or road sometimes doubles back upon itself so that a point which you will not reach on it for hours is right beside you? Then we could short-cut across to that point and reach a time actually millions of years ahead in the future!

"I saw this and determined to find a way to double the time-dimension back on itself to permit that short-cut into the future. Dimensions can be altered by force, you know—Einstein's space-frames and the Fitzgerald contraction show that. And after two years of research I found a combination of magnetic and electrical forces capable of bending the time-dimension back in that way, of doubling time back upon itself!

"To utilize that force I built what I've



*"From both sides they rushed upon us with incredible swiftness."*

called a time-doubler, a tub-like half-cylinder that holds inside it the mechanism that produces the time-bending force, and that has room for two or three occupants. By turning on that force the time-dimension along which the doubler moves is bent back upon itself, and the doubler, if set for a time ten million years ahead, is shot into that time, its force affecting only itself and occupants. By reversing the force the doubler and those in it can return to this time.

"Less than a week ago I finished the time-doubler and gave it its tests. I resolved to cross in it to a time ten million years ahead, but then, with all preparations finished, knew that I could not go alone. I remembered you two, Fairley and Olcott, always keen for adventure, and so had you come here to put it up to you. The time-doubler is ready in the workshop, and in it within the hour I'm starting, and want you to start with me, to a time ten million years in the future!"

WE TWO had listened to Norton with tense interest, and when he paused Fairley asked a quick question.

"But granting that the thing is possible, Norton, why go so far in time—why take such a tremendous jump into the future as that?"

"Can you ask why? Man, have you no desire to know what this world and man are going to be like in ten million years? Think of the changes and progress of the last hundred years, the last thousand years. What colossal changes will there not be in the next ten million years, then? What colossal heights and

powers may humanity not have reached?"

"Lord!" breathed Fairley. "I see now —it *is* an adventure."

"And we're going!" I exclaimed. "Of course we're going!"

Fairley and I followed Morton through the door into the large workroom that took up the remainder of the old house's ground-floor. It had been formed, evidently, by the throwing together of a number of smaller rooms, and presented an odd, white-lit scene. Great pieces of apparatus, Tesla coils and super-sensitive ammeter-boards and gleaming electronic-radiation instruments were ranged neatly along its walls.

We two had eyes only for the object at the room's end. That was a tub-like thing of polished metal ten feet across and four in height. Half its interior was occupied by a bulging black metal case that shielded mechanisms half-glimpsed through perforations in the case. On its top were a half-dozen black plugs with twice as many openings about them.

"The time-doubler," Norton said quietly.

"And that thing can actually take us across ten million years of time?" Fairley asked, half incredulously.

"Just that. When the mechanisms in that case operate they produce the force that bends the time-dimension back upon itself, shifting the time-doubler and all in it across the gap to a point ten million years in the future. We won't change position in space at all, of course, but will find ourselves in this same spot as it will be ten million years from now."

"It's beyond belief," I said, staring.

Norton smiled. "I think that you'll believe soon," he commented.

Before we two were conscious of the nearness of our start, Norton was quickly directing preparations. He had us bring from our suitcases the rough clothing and pistols we had brought at his request. As we donned these, struggling against the incredulity that lingered still in our minds, Norton was loading into the time-doubler an assortment of compact equipment we might need.

He climbed in after these and lifted the case from the central mechanism, inspecting for a last time its myriad intricate coils and radiation-plates. When he replaced the case he shifted two of the plugs on its top to other openings, and at once a purring came from the mechanism. Norton shifted another plug and the purring sank to an almost inaudible whisper of soft sound. He looked up then at us, smiling whimsically.

Fairley and I climbed carefully into the thing, seating ourselves beside him on the time-doubler's bottom. My pulse was racing with excitement despite myself, yet I expected at least some moments or delay before our start. But Norton acted with a startling abruptness as soon as we were beside him. His fingers snapped out and shifted another plug and instantly the low purring sound became for a second thunderous and deafening, and black unconsciousness crashed upon me.

OUT of the black depths of unconsciousness I rose with the sensation of hands upon my face and excited voices in my ears. I was aware in a moment that they were the voices of Norton and Fairley, and as I opened my eyes I saw that I was lying in the time-doubler's bottom with the other two bending excitedly over me.

"We've done it!" Norton was crying. "Olcott, we've done it!"

"What—you don't mean——" I stammered, and then as I staggered to my feet was silent, thunderstruck.

For the time-doubler in which we were stood no longer in the white-lit, apparatus-filled workroom. It stood in strange,

thin sunlight, tilted a little awry, upon a thick bed of what seemed gray-green moss. This was at the bottom of a small depression or gully, and on its sides there were thick growths of great looming lichens, the same gray-green in color. It seemed the vegetation of another world, the soft moss and great lichen-like growths, even though we at the depression's bottom could see only its interior.

I noted dazedly too that the sun seemed rather of deep orange in color than the familiar golden yellow, and that its light was thinner and its apparent size much smaller. Also its heat, though falling full upon us, was far less than might have been expected, the sun's position showing that it was midafternoon.

"We've done it!" Norton was still exclaiming. "We've crossed ten million years of time!"

"But the sun—these growths——" I attempted.

"Just what we might have expected," Norton said. "Every sun as it grows older changes from yellow toward red in color, and shrinks in size. And these lichen-growths around us only show that in this vast stretch of time the plant-life of earth has changed completely and evolved into wholly new forms."

"But let's get up out of this!" Fairley exclaimed. "We can see nothing down here."

"The doubler——" I began doubtfully, but he shook his head impatiently.

"It will be safe enough—we're not going far from it."

Norton nodded, as eager as we to extend our view; so with a glance at the weapons in our belts we turned from the time-doubler and began climbing up the steep slope of the gully toward its crest. The soft moss slipped and gave beneath our feet, but in a moment we had reached the slope's top and stood gazing in wonder about us.

It was a great lichen-forest that stretched about us. The big gray-green growths crowded us in on every side. Branchless and leafless, they were themselves like erect masses of moss, ten feet or more in height. There moved among them no birds or small animals, nor did we see even insects. It was the landscape of another planet—the silent forest of grotesque growths stretching as far about us as the eye could reach.

We began to thread our way between the looming things, heading in a general easterly direction. We were all three keyed to a high pitch of suspense—the excitement I felt reflected from the faces of Norton and Fairley. What were we to find in this strange world that earth had become during the ten million slow years we had crossed in a flash? What mighty works and cities of man might not lie near to us, the product of countless cumulated centuries of man's progress?

The silence, though, began to tell upon my nerves as we went on. Even our footsteps were deadened by the soft, cushion-like moss that covered the lichened forest's floor. So complete was the silence that it was a shock to our senses, accustomed to the innumerable small noises of everyday life. The harshest of sounds would have been welcome.

I was about to speak to Norton for no other reason than to break the stillness, when he abruptly halted and listened.

There came again the sound that had at that moment reached our ears, a distant thumping as of something striking the earth with great force. It repeated, multiplied, thump following thump swiftly and seeming to become quickly louder. We looked at each other, startled and wondering. The thumping was so loud by then that a sudden sensation of fear invaded me.

"Whatever it is, it's coming closer!"

I exclaimed. "We'd best get out of here until we know what it is."

Norton nodded swiftly. "Yes—back to the time-doubler!' he ordered.

We turned, were running back, when Fairley after a few steps glanced back over his shoulder and then halted, pointing wildly.

"There they are!" he cried. "My God, what are they?"

We were all frozen for the moment by our amazement as we looked back with him. The thumping in that moment had become terribly loud, the ground seeming to vibrate beneath it through all the forest, and now we saw its source.

Five giant shapes were striding through the lichen-growths not a half-mile behind us! They were perhaps forty feet in height, huge white metal things coming almost in our direction! Each of the things consisted of four huge jointed limbs or legs of metal which met at their upper end to support a metal cup or bowl.

The things strode forward as a four-footed animal does, moving two of the great metal legs at a time. Each great step thus brought them almost a score of feet forward, the metal limbs crashing through lichens and moss and striking the ground to cause the thumping that was loud in our ears. And up in the cup of each of the incredible things we glimpsed something green and moving!

"They're machines—stalking-machines of some kind!" Norton exclaimed. "But they can't have seen us yet—they——"

"They *have* seen us!" Fairley cried. "Look—they're after us!"

The five great stalking-machines had, in the second before, changed their direction suddenly and with thundering strides were coming with abruptly increased speed straight after us!

"The time-doubler!" Norton cried again. "Get back to it and out of here!"

RUNNING with all possible speed between the lichens, we headed back toward the gully in which we had left the time-doubler. But I knew with sickening sureness as we ran on in the next seconds that we could not evade those giant shapes whose vast limbs were crashing closer each moment behind us.

I suppose that that nightmare flight of ours through the lichen-forest lasted for moments only, though seeming then like hours. It ended abruptly. Norton, who was running more than a dozen feet behind Fairley and myself, tripped suddenly in the soft moss and sprawled headlong. I cried to Fairley as I glimpsed it and we half-halted to turn back toward him but were stayed by his shout.

"No—go on—go on!" he cried. "They've got me——!"

For even in that second, as he struggled to regain his feet, the foremost of the giant metal shapes was almost upon him. From its cup dangled great many-jointed metal arms that were reaching down toward our friend.

I had a lightning glimpse of Norton grasped by the great arms and raised aloft, at the same moment that Fairley jerked me sidewise and into a thick clump of the lichen-growths beside us. He pulled me to the ground with him, the two of us crouching deep into the sheltering growths.

"They'll have us if we run from them —we can't make the time-doubler now!" Fairley was whispering rapidly in my ear. "Our only chance is to hide from them."

"But Norton——" I protested.

"We can't help him now," he answered. "And they're not harming him —look!"

We could glimpse through the masses of growths that sheltered us the scene some distance back in the lichens.

The stalking-machine that had gripped

Norton in its great arms had raised him high in the air to deposit him in the great cup at the mechanism's top. We could see green shapes moving in that cup around Norton as he was deposited among them, and then he vanished from our view inside it.

The other stalking-machines had for the moment gathered around that one, apparently forgetting us two in the interest of Norton's capture. But abruptly they or their green occupants seemed to remember our own existence and came forward with huge, crashing strides after us. We crouched lower, and scarce dared to breathe when the five towering metal shapes halted almost beside the thick clump of lichens in which we lay.

They seemed scanning the forest for us, as though puzzled by our sudden disappearance. From where we lay all that Fairley and I could see of the machines then were some of their great limbs, huge white metal columns sunk deep into the moss and earth with every step. These mighty legs began in a moment to lift and crash down again all around us, as the stalking-machines commenced apparently to beat the growths in search of us.

We could hear the thumping crash of their steps as they moved ponderously and deliberately all about us. Crouching with Fairley in the thickest portion of the clump, I felt all the nightmare unreality of the situation. We could hear the great jointed arms thrashing through the growths and knew that we were being hunted as boys might hunt some hiding, timid animals. And less than an hour before we had been back in Norton's laboratory! Less than an hour in one sense—but ten million years, in another.

I gasped involuntarily as a huge limb crashed down into the growths not a yard from us. It seemed that the pounding of my pulse must be audible to whatever creatures were in the cup of the stalking-machine that stood over us. And when a big metal arm swept through the lichens in which we crouched, I restrained myself from crying out only by clenching my fists tightly. The arm's end, a great claw-like thing of metal, moved this way and that about us and in its searchings actually passed between Fairley and me. Rigid with fear, we could not relax until seconds after it had withdrawn.

The stalking-machine over us moved on with crashing steps to search other clumps, and we breathed a little more easily. Venturing to peer forth again from our crushed sheltering growths, we saw the five great shapes moving still in search of us through the unearthly forest. Once or twice we saw their great jointed limbs bending as they stooped down, as though to examine something on the ground.

One stooped close beside the growths in which we hid, and as we had thus a close view of the machine's cup and its occupants we uttered low exclamations, amazement making us forget our peril.

"In the cup!" I whispered. "God, Fairley—you see them?"

"Plants!" he muttered, stunned. "It can't be—we're insane, man, such a thing can't be!"

The thing that we were looking upon was, in fact, well-nigh unbelievable. We had glimpsed the occupants of the stalking-machines before only as green moving shapes high above us. With the unconscious anthropomorphism that is so strong in all men, we had assumed, I think, that these were green-clad or green-skinned men or man-like creatures. Only men could have built and operated such mechanisms, experience assured us. But now we could see that the green things had not the remotest resemblance to men or even to animals of any kind, but were plants, great green plants that

were occupying and intelligently operating the huge stalking-machines!

The cup of each of the big machines was, we saw, filled with what seemed smooth black soil, though I am inclined now to believe that it was not in fact soil but a special combination of chemical elements. And in this, in each machine's cup, were rooted three or four great plants. I had never seen plants like them. There was a central dark-green trunk or core, about four feet high, from the base of which sprang up a number of flat, strong arms or tendrils, of lighter green.

But what was most amazing was that these arms moved this way and that, consciously and deliberately, over the controls of the stalking-machine, directing it on its search for us in the lichens! The plants rooted there in the black soil of the machine's cup were the great mechanism's operators, and though they could have no more sense of sight or even hearing than any other plant, they were searching by some strange sense of their own that had told them we were near! They were plants, nothing else, but were *intelligent* plants, sentient plants who in their machines were hunting us as men might hunt rabbits!

THE stalking-machine that had stooped near us to give us that amazing glimpse now straightened and moved on. It left us transfixed, our peril almost forgotten in our stunned astonishment.

"Plants!" Fairley was repeating dazedly beside me. "And the damned things are alive—intelligent—searching for us! What kind of a hell has earth become in these last ten million years, to have spawned things like that?"

"God knows," I whispered. "Plants operating machines—it can't be real!"

"Whatever they are, they've got Norton," he said. "And if they——"

"Look! They've given up the search—they're going, Fairley!"

The five towering stalking-machines had gathered together as though at a command, and were moving off with their great crashing steps toward the west, having evidently given up hope of finding us. We ran out from our lichen shelter. The five shapes were already almost out of sight of us, so quickly did they stride through the lichen forest. We saw the moving green arms of the plants in their cups, and I seemed to glimpse in the cup of one, too, a dark form that was Norton, unmoving. Then they were out of sight, hidden from us by the big growths around us, the thumping crash of their steps diminishing and dying away.

I wondered when I turned toward Fairley whether my face was as pale and strange as his own.

The lichen forest about us was as silent now as before, the thin orange light of the westering sun slanting over its great gray-green expanse.

Fairley was speaking rapidly. "We can't go back without Norton. We've got to find him, alive or dead, before we return to the time-doubler."

"I don't think they'll kill him, at least immediately," I said slowly. "Those plants—they had a good enough chance to do that when they took him, if they had wanted."

He laughed mirthlessly. "Did we ever dream, Olcott, that we would be running from plants—hiding from plants? Are we ten million years in the future or are we in nightmare?"

"It's not wholly incomprehensible, even so, Fairley," I said. "After all, if man evolved to intelligence and power from the animal races, why should not one of the plant races have evolved to as great or greater intelligence in these thousands of centuries?"

"It may be so—it may be so," he answered. "There's a horror to the thing that sickens me, though. To cross time into the future—it wasn't meant, Olcott, I see now. We've got to get back."

"But first—Norton," I said, and he nodded, gazed westward with me. "We'll find him," he told me. "They left trail enough for us to follow."

Westward from us, in fact, there extended a great path crushed through the thick lichen-growths of the forest by the passage of the five stalking-machines. We set out along this path, first examining the pistols whose existence we had forgotten, perhaps luckily for ourselves, until then. The stillness of the strange forest was again oppressive as we moved on, our footsteps muffled as before by the crushed lichens and mosses on which we trod.

Fairley's face was as strange and set as I knew my own must be, and we moved without conversation. I do not think that in either of our heads was there any clear idea of what we might do. We knew only that somewhere ahead the plants were moving on in their stalking-machines with Norton, and that we were following our friend.

I SUPPOSE that we had gone a half-mile through the lichen forest along that broad crushed path when I became gradually aware that we were being trailed by some creature or creatures. From the tail of my eye I had glimpsed in the last minutes a vague shape or shapes slipping through the lichens beside the path we followed.

In moments more I was sure that I was right. I whispered the news to Fairley, and showing no suspicion we walked steadily on, but alert now and with hands upon our pistols. We could clearly discern shapes moving in the surrounding lichens by then, though too vaguely to make out what manner of creatures they were. The sight of them, though, was enough to key our already taut nerves up to the breaking-point of tension, and I think that in a moment more we would have dashed into the lichens to confront our stalkers rather than endure such tension longer.

But at that moment there was a blood-curdling *whispering* cry, and a dozen men leaped from the surrounding lichens toward us.

They were photographed on my brain in the instant that they sprang, Fairley and I jerking our pistols forth. They were men of short stature whose skins and even whose hair was of an unnaturally bleached white. Their only clothing was a short tunic with breast-straps of woven moss, and each carried either a short metal-pointed spear or a curving blade of hammered metal much like a simitar. From both sides they rushed on us, with incredible swiftness, and before I had my own pistol half raised toward them it had been knocked from my grasp by the impact of their rush and I was struggling among them.

There was no further fight on my part —I was simply overwhelmed and borne to the ground. I heard a choking cry from Fairley and saw him overpowered also before he could fire a shot.

Instantly the white savages raised us from the ground, and with two of their number carrying each of us began moving rapidly into the lichens of the forest. They carried on a whispering conversation as they went along, their voices so low as to be almost inaudible, and I thought that many of their words that I heard were familiar to my ears, words out of my own and a half-dozen other languages, but distorted and changed in pronunciation. Any chance we might have had to try speaking with them was obviated by the fact that those who car-

ried us kept a hand tightly across our mouths to prevent all possible outcry.

I could observe them more closely as we were borne along, though, and saw that despite their unnatural whiteness of skin and hair, many of them had intelligent-looking faces.

A very patent fear was painted on them now, though, and they kept glancing aboút and backward constantly as they moved through the towering lichens. Once, when we came to what I knew was the crushed track of another of the great stalking-machines, they halted completely and did not go forward until one of their number had reconnoitered for some minutes. It was very evident that they knew of the existence of the intelligent plants and their huge striding mechanisms, and were in mortal fear of meeting them.

At last they halted with us beside a great clump of lichens, and after cautiously looking about, moved into the clump's depths. A round hole about a yard across yawned in the earth there and into this the foremost of the white savages crawled, head foremost.

We saw them disappear down the hole and then they motioned for us to do likewise, releasing us but menacing us with the spears and blades. The dark burrow-like opening was singularly uninviting but there was no choice, and gingerly I crawled down into it, Fairley following. I found that it widened out into a fairly large cavity inside, however, though completely dark. Our captors, whose eyes were evidently more attuned to this darkness than ours, grasped us and hurried us into a low tunnel as dark, but in which we could walk by bending almost double.

As we moved through this dark tunnel their voices rose from whispering to a more normal tone, and they took no precautions to keep us silent longer. Fairley's voice came from the darkness behind me, the first time I had heard it since the attack and capture.

"Olcott, you're all right?" he asked. "Do you think we could make a break for it now—fight back up?"

"Are there many of them behind you?" I asked in return.

"A half-dozen, I suppose," he answered.

"Too many," I told him. "They can see better than we in this darkness and know their way—they'd have us in a moment with those spears."

"Look!" he said suddenly. "Light ahead."

I had seen it at the same moment. It was a circle of pale, misty light so feeble as hardly to deserve the name, that marked the end of the tunnel we followed. In a moment, with our captors around us, we emerged from the tunnel into a quite large cavern hollowed from the earth, and illuminated by that feeble bluish glow of light. The first thing I saw was that the light had its source from great phosphorescent lichens growing from the cavern's earth walls. I was later to learn that they were selected and planted there for that purpose, forming the only illumination of these burrows beneath earth's surface.

This cavity or burrow held more than a hundred white-skinned and white-haired men and women and children like our captors. Most of them occupied the large cavern itself, but there were others in smaller holes or cavities in its walls, the latter being evidently for the accommodation of separate families.

There was no fire in all the cave, nor indeed would fire have been possible without danger of suffocation by smoke. Many of the people in it were eating chunks of thick white pulpy stuff that I recognized as broken from lichen-stems. Some prepared these by rolling and kneading it upon rocks, and there were

some rude vessels of hammered metal used to transport and hold water from a trickle that gurgled from the great cavern's wall.

We stared across this blue-lit cavern in amazement, its occupants approaching and thronging about us with a fearful curiosity.

"And *this* is the height mankind has reached after ten million years!" Fairley exclaimed. "This is the colossal civilization we came across time to see!"

I was as stupefied as he. "Good God! To have been bleached white like this, they must have lived down in these dim burrows for generations!"

"Plants stalking the earth in great machines and men hiding from them in burrows as the beasts once hid from men! Olcott, are we dreaming it?"

OUR captors, pushing out of the way the curious throng that crowded about us, conducted us to one of the smaller cavities hollowed in the main cavern's side. Lit by the feeble blue glow of a few of the phosphorescent lichens, it held a half-dozen seated men who surveyed us with astonishment as our guards made quick explanations to them of our capture.

Our captors seemed to address themselves to a single one of the half-dozen, a man much older than the others, with that stamped upon his wrinkled face and in his steady eyes that marked him as a ruler. As he listened he was surveying us closely, and when the explanations were finished he commented to the others in his deep voice. I was surprized to find that we could understand to some extent what he was saying.

His speech, like that of the others, was in fact our own language, changed and distorted by the tremendous stretch of time across which we had come. It held many words and phrases quite unknown to us, but was understandable, and in what follows I give rather the sense of what we gathered from their speech than the mixture of known and unknown words that these people actually employed.

"Surely these two are from no burrow known to me," he was saying. "I have visited many burrows in my time, even beyond the lichen-forest, but never saw men such as these, dark of hair and strange of dress."

"It may be that they are not men at all, O Gerkel," suggested one beside him.

"Aye, men do not walk in open sunlight as these were walking when our hunters captured them," said a third. "Only the great plants and those who serve them dare do that."

"Yet these are not of the great plants but are men," a clean-featured younger man pointed out. "It may be that they are from some distant burrow where men are different from us."

Gerkel nodded. "You say true, Blan—they are men. Yet even so they may be spies of the plants—such a thing has been known before."

Until then we had listened, but now Fairley, with a glance at me, spoke to them, slowly and clearly.

"We are men indeed, O Gerkel," he told the older man, "but we are not from any burrow, neither are we spies of the great plants. We did not know until today that either the plants or your people existed. We came with another from a time ages on ages in the past, and that other was captured by the plants in great machines. We, following to find and rescue him, were captured in turn by your hunters and brought here."

The men before us had followed Fairley's words intently. Gerkel was the first to speak.

"That is a strange tale—that you come from far in the past. Were you like us I would say that you lie, yet it is true that

there have not been for ages men dark of hair and brown of skin as yourselves."

"It is the truth," Fairley said. "Hidden in the lichens above is the machine in which we came."

There was a whisper of wonder among the others. "They must be speaking truth, indeed," Blan said, "for had they been men like ourselves they would have had too great a fear of the plants to walk in the open as they did."

"Is it true," Gerkel asked, "that in the far past men ruled earth as now the plants do? I have heard the legends that they still tell of how, before the great plants rose and mastered the races of men, there were no burrows at all and men lived upon earth's surface in day and night without fear."

"It is true," I answered. "We come ourselves from that time and are amazed to find men hiding thus and fleeing from plants."

Gerkel shook his head sadly. "You know our world not," he said. "The great plants are mighty and they are merciless. Hide from them as we do in our burrows, their great stalking-machines watch for us ever in the lichen-forests and capture all they find to take to their plant-cities for slaves. If they have taken your friend, abandon hope for him, for no man ever escapes the cities of the plants. You are free to go, for I see that you are really men; yet if you are wise you will remain in this burrow, where alone you will not need to fear the plants."

"No, if our friend lives we will find him," I answered, "Whether in a plant-city or not, we are going after him."

"And I will go with you!" Blan exclaimed excitedly. "For weeks has Julla, my brother, been a slave in the plant-city to the west, and what you can risk for your friend, surely can I for him!"

The others cried out. "Are you mad, Blan?" Gerkel asked. "None in all our race has ever dared approach the cities of the plants!"

"Yet if these strangers can dare it, I can!" Blan answered. "There is one way by which we three can enter the plant-city, I think, and that is as slaves. You must change that strange dress of yours for tunics of moss like mine, and we must carry our metal blades with us as weapons. Once inside, we should be able to find among the slaves my brother and your friend."

"It's a chance, Olcott!" Fairley exclaimed. "We'll have to leave our clothes and pistols here, but the latter would be useless against the plants anyway, I think."

Swiftly, with those about us still stunned by Blan's plan, we changed into the woven moss tunics he brought us, receiving with them the simitar-like metal blades that would be our only weapons. Blan then crumbled a porous lichen-stem into a white powder that he rubbed quickly through our hair, giving it the same bleached white appearance as that of the others. Fairley and I hardly recognized each other when he had finished.

Ready then to go, we paused with Blan. I shall not soon forget the picture of that scene—the blue-lit cavity with the white-haired and white-faced men about us, most of them silent in their awe of what we were undertaking. I suppose that they looked upon us as bent upon sheer suicide in even daring approach one of the cities of the dreaded plants.

Gerkel clasped our hands, a gesture that had survived a hundred thousand centuries.

"I know that none of you will come back ever," he said, "that you go to death or slavery. Yet, I do not know why, I am glad to have lived to see this—to see men going forth and holding the power of the great plants as nothing."

Blan and Fairley and I turned then and

emerged from the smaller cavity into the large main cavern or burrow. The men and women in it watched us in awe as we crossed it toward the dark mouth of the tunnel leading upward. Some of the men called farewells to Blan as though to one on the point of death.

BLAN led the way surely up through the darkness of the tunnel, Fairley and I linking hands with him as we half walked, half crawled after him in it. We reached the tunnel's mouth, and after Blan had peered cautiously forth for a full five minutes we pulled ourselves up into the growth of lichens that masked the shaft's entrance.

The small orange sun was sinking rapidly now toward the western horizon. Fairley and I stood for a moment, breathing great lungfuls of the open air, feeling an inexpressible relief at being in sunlight and open air once more after the dim burrows and tunnels beneath. Blan, though, seemed to feel only a marked increase in caution upon emerging, his eyes darting this way and that keenly in search of danger.

He laid a finger significantly upon his lips and then pointed westward, starting in that direction. Fairley and I followed him closely, and in a few minutes saw that he was keeping always as much as possible within the screening shelter of the lichen-growths, skirting each patch of open ground as though it represented a deadly peril. The degree of his caution showed me more than anything else the depths of fear in which the monstrous plants kept these men of the future.

The sinking sun was in our faces as we moved on, a small disk of orange-red fire that the passing ages had dimmed enough to make it possible for one almost to stare into it. I strove to get my bearings again as we went on, placing the direction of the gully that held the time-doubler as well as possible.

Like three white shadows we slipped silently westward through the lichen-forest. Once Blan relaxed his cautious glances enough to point into a clump of great growths we were passing, whispering something I could not catch. I saw in the clump, though, a round tunnel-opening like that of the burrow from which we had come, and wondered how far beneath the ground we trod, in what dim-lit cavern, other white-haired and white-faced men were living. Yes, and in how many such burrows beneath the great forest, and maybe beneath all earth's surface, were men and women being born and living out their lives and dying? Descendants of those who had been earth's lords living now beneath the shadow of earth's new lords, the plants!

The thought, though it shook me, passed, for Blan's carefulness was by then increasing so much as to make it evident we were nearing our goal. We could see nothing unusual, the gray-green sea of the vast lichen-forest stretching about us endlessly, but in a moment I could see that somewhere not far ahead the ground sloped downward sharply. We went more slowly, at Blan's warning whisper, and at last crouched beneath a small lichen thicket on the crest, gazing downward.

From where we were the ground sloped downward, bare save for its moss carpet, into a great moss-covered sunken bowl or valley. This circular valley, in which were no lichen-growths at all, may have been three miles across, its level floor a few hundred yards down the slope from us. It was lit by the orange sun just touching the opposite horizon or crest, and in this natural great bowl was the city of plants we sought, a city without buildings.

Fairley and I stared, with Blan as fascinated as ourselves. I think that for the moment we two had forgotten Norton

entirely in the sheer amazement of what we saw.

The city was round, enclosed by a thick wall of white metal two-score feet in height. Just inside that wall was a circular row of deep square pits whose purpose in that first glance was not clear to us. Inside this circle of pits were circular rows of great gleaming machines very strange in appearance. They stood in the open air upon the smooth black soil that formed the city's floor. Some of them were apparently giant mixing-machines, that used paddle-like arms to crush up masses of various lichens and mosses with other materials in sunken tanks. Others turned forth linked lengths or great bars of the shining white metal. Still others were too vague for our eyes to distinguish.

But the most astounding feature was that before each of these machines was rooted in the ground one of the great green plants, operating and controlling its machine with its tendril-arms.

The sight was incredible—this city of plants in which plants worked steadily and intelligently, rooted as they were. I could see many of the huge stalking-machines coming and going across this unearthly plant-metropolis, each with plants rooted in the soil of their cups, directing the stalking-machines as we had seen them in the forest, carrying enormous burdens back and forth with them. The plants in the stalking-machines were the only ones that moved, however, all the others in the city being rooted in the ground by whatever machine or spot that held their particular task.

I saw beyond the rows of machines, toward the amazing city's center, rows of smaller plants that had apparently no work assigned them, growing in great beds and awaiting their full stature before taking up their part of the city's life. Stalking-machines were transplanting some of the larger of them even as we watched, placing them by whatever machine or task had been assigned them. And in beyond even these I glimpsed at the city's far center a circle of unusually large plants at the center of which grew one positively huge. The plant-ruler of this weird plant-city, growing at its center and ruling it by whatever strange senses they used for sight and speech!

And, last and most terrible feature of all, there moved through the plant-city hundreds — yes, thousands — of human slaves, white-haired men and women like Blan beside me! Beneath the silent commands of the plants, expressed to them telepathically, they labored in this city of their masters. Many of them were occupied in feeding materials into the machines the plants controlled. Others were engaged in tending the beds of young plants, changing the soil about them and turning on them fine sprays. Still others aided plants in assembling metal sections into new machines. And, one sickened with horror to see, it was the plants who worked by far the most swiftly and intelligently with their tendril-arms, the humans seeming clumsy and dull and brute-like in comparison with them!

"Good God!" It was Fairley's exclamation, shaken with horror. "That you and I should look on such a sight, Olcott —plant masters and human slaves!"

"Norton!" I whispered. "Norton's down there somewhere, Fairley—is one of those slaves."

It steadied him. "Norton, in that hell!" he whispered. "But we'll have him out—how do you plan to enter the city, Blan?"

Blan pointed downward. "See—that gate."

IN THE city's metal wall, almost directly down the slope from us, was a gate or opening a dozen feet in width. On either

side of this opening was rooted a great plant, and the two of them, with their tendril-arms moving slowly and restlessly, had all the appearance of sentinels or guards.

"That is the gate we must go through," Blan was saying. "When darkness comes all the slaves inside the city, except a few left free to care for the beds of small plants in the night, will be herded into those square pits for the night. And soon after night's coming almost all the plants in the city will be sleeping."

"Sleeping?" interrupted Fairley incredulously, and Blan nodded.

"Yes, the plants sleep even as men do at night."

"Of course!" I exclaimed. "Don't you remember, Fairley, the botanist back in our own time who tested plants and found they went into torpor or sleep by night?"

"All the city's plants will be sleeping," Blan continued, "save those who guard the city at night, these being the plants rooted at its gates and other plants who watch over the city in stalking-machines and do not sleep. We will steal down through the darkness to that gate you see and will try with our blades to slay the two plants guarding it before they are aware of our presence and can flash a telepathic alarm to those in the stalking-machines.

"If we can slay them thus and get inside the city we can search the pits of the slaves for my brother and your friend, and if we find Julla and your Norton, can escape back out again, before the alarm is raised. Since we resemble slaves ourselves we will be less noticeable in the city if seen, since some, as I said, work throughout the night; yet even though they think us slaves, the plants would slay us if they caught us near the pits. It is the only plan that has any chance of success; and if it fails we had better die at once, since otherwise we will remain as slaves of the plants while we live."

"In other words, it's a case of do or die," said Fairley, and Blan grinned, a very human grin.

"With the chances strongly on dying," he added.

By then the sun was sinking behind the opposite crest of the bowl-like valley that held the plant-city, and as dusk settled upon it its activities began to lessen. We saw the plants in the city turning off the great machines they controlled. Many of the plants operating stalking-machines brought these to rest for the night by allowing their great limbs to fold under them so that they rested with cups but a little above the ground.

A half-hundred of the many stalking-machines still remained active, however, engaged in herding the masses of white slaves from the work that had been theirs during the day toward the ring of square pits that held them by night. The giant white metal machines, the plants directing them almost invisible, were like men herding sheep as they pressed the men and women slaves toward the pits.

Metal flexible ladders like rope-ladders were unreeled into the pits and the slaves descended these like docile beasts, the ladders being drawn up again when all were in the pits. Containers of what was evidently food of some kind were lowered then into the pits by the stalking-machines.

The dusk was thickening rapidly and we could see that now the city's plants, except those at the gate and those in the guarding stalking-machines, were sinking into sleep, their tendril-arms folding up around their central trunks. Complete darkness was almost upon us, relieved by the white glimmer of starlight. By it we could see that all the plant-city was sleeping indeed. The plants rooted beside their machines, those rooted in the cups of the

resting stalking-machines, the beds of smaller plants nearer the city's center, and no doubt even that huge plant-king we had glimpsed at the city's heart—all these slept with tendrils shut, and there slept too now the masses of their human slaves in the ring of pits.

The only sound was of the great strides of the guarding stalking-machines moving to and fro in the city. Yet Blan restrained us still.

We crouched silently, gazing down toward the weird city that was clear now to our eyes in the white light of the stars. I looked up toward those stars. They blazed in the moonless night with a splendor new to me. All of the constellations known to me were gone, I saw, yet the skies were more brilliant than ever I had seen them. In the ten million years we had crossed, the sun had led his family of worlds into a part of the universe far more thick with stars than had been the case in our own time.

Of all our weird venture that was, I think, the weirdest moment — that in which Fairley and I crouched with Blan above the sleeping plant-city and beneath unfamiliar stars.

At last Blan rose silently. "We can start now," he whispered. "I will approach the gate from the right and you from the left—we will strike together to slay the plant-guards on either side."

"But will their senses warn them of our attack?" I asked.

"Not if we move swiftly enough," Blan replied. "Their strange plant-senses serve them as well as sight and hearing by day, but at night are not so effective, as my people have found. We can slay them before they can give a telepathic alarm if we are swift enough."

WE GRASPED our simitar-like blades and crept out of the shelter of the lichens and into the clear starlight. Down the slope we went, our steps as silent as those of ghosts in the soft moss.

Soon we were near enough to the wall and gate to see clearly the two great plants who guarded the opening. Their slow-waving tendrils showed that they were still waking and watchful. Blan noiselessly left our side, gliding away like a white phantom to the right, and then he on one side and Fairley and I on the other, were creeping toward the gate, keeping far enough aside from it to be out of range of the strange senses of the guarding plants.

We two reached the metal wall, and hugging it began a slow stealthy progress along it toward the gate-opening. Reaching that opening we hesitated, our swords tight-gripped in our hands. Then we saw Blan appear on the gate's other side, slipping along the wall like ourselves, a gliding white form. He too halted, grasping his blade, and then with one hand made a silent signal to us. Instantly he and we were leaping around the wall's corner onto the two great plants.

The great plant that Fairley and I sprang for loomed before us as a dark many-armed object, whose tendrils whipped wildly as our blades slashed lightning-like through them.

One of the tendrils, even as it was cut through, coiled like a dark plant-snake around Fairley, but our slashes had been true and had cloven the big plant's central trunk or core through at the base. Its movements ceased, and as we turned wildly we saw that Blan too had slain with a single terrific blow the other of the plant-guards.

We stood silent, breathless, waiting in indescribable suspense for the alarm that would follow had the plant-guards been able to fling a thought-warning into the city in dying. But there came no alarm, the stalking-machines in the city striding to and fro as before.

"We are safe for the moment," Blan whispered. "We killed them before they could give warning. But we must make haste—if they are found dead like this by any of the stalking-machines we will be trapped inside the city!"

"The pits!" I exclaimed. "Let's get at our search—the sooner we find Norton and Julla the better."

We ran silently through the gate and between its sprawled dead guards, toward the ring of square pits that belted the city inside the wall. My heart sank as I visualized the number of them and the thousands of slaves they held, but I knew that only by systematic search of them could we find the men we sought.

In moments we were at the edge of the nearest of the pits. It was some thirty feet square and as deep. Working silently but swiftly we located the ladder we had seen dropped into it, and after a little examination of its simple mechanism unwound the flexible ladder again and dropped it into the pit.

Then while Fairley stood watch at the ladder's top, Blan and I climbed quickly down into the pit. Its bottom was covered by a tangled mass of humanity sprawled in sleep, white-skinned forms in every posture, lying sleeping in the clear starlight that penetrated the pit.

By the starlight we examined their faces swiftly, stepping over them with infinite care as we did so. Were we to awake them it would mean inevitable alarm and discovery, for we could not hope to rescue any number of them and the clamor of those left behind would rouse the city. Also, as Blan had told us, many of the slaves had become so habituated to their servitude that they would have betrayed to their plant-masters any fellow-slave who attempted to escape.

Within minutes we had satisfied ourselves that none in that pit were those we sought, and quickly we climbed the ladder and wound it up again, so that none of the slaves might wake and find it and arouse the plant-guards.

We raced on to the next pit. Back farther in the city the guardian stalking-machines were coming and going watchfully still, but we paid them almost no attention for the moment in the tenseness of our search. Our search of the second pit was a repetition of that of the first, yet in that pit neither were the men for whom we searched. And when we searched a third pit, and a fourth and a fifth, without further results, a despair latent in me from the first strengthened and would not be banished. How could we hope to find in all the city's pits and all its slaves the two we sought, before we ourselves were discovered?

And as Fairley and Blan and I hastened on toward the sixth pit, we had abrupt warning that discovery was close at hand. A stalking-machine, coming from ahead, loomed suddenly up in the starlight before us!

As one we flung ourselves aside, into the shadow of a looming mixing-machine to our right. With crashing strides the huge machine stalked toward us, the plants high up in its cup visible to us as dark many-tendrilled shapes. One of its four giant limbs crashed down but a few feet from where we lay, and I had a horrible moment in which it seemed that the towering shape was halting over us. It passed on, though, going along the ring of pits in the direction we had come.

"It's going in the direction of the gate!" Fairley whispered as we scrambled to our feet. "If it finds those dead plants there——"

"The next pit!" Blan exclaimed. "We've got to keep up the search—if we don't find them soon now, it's all up with all of us!"

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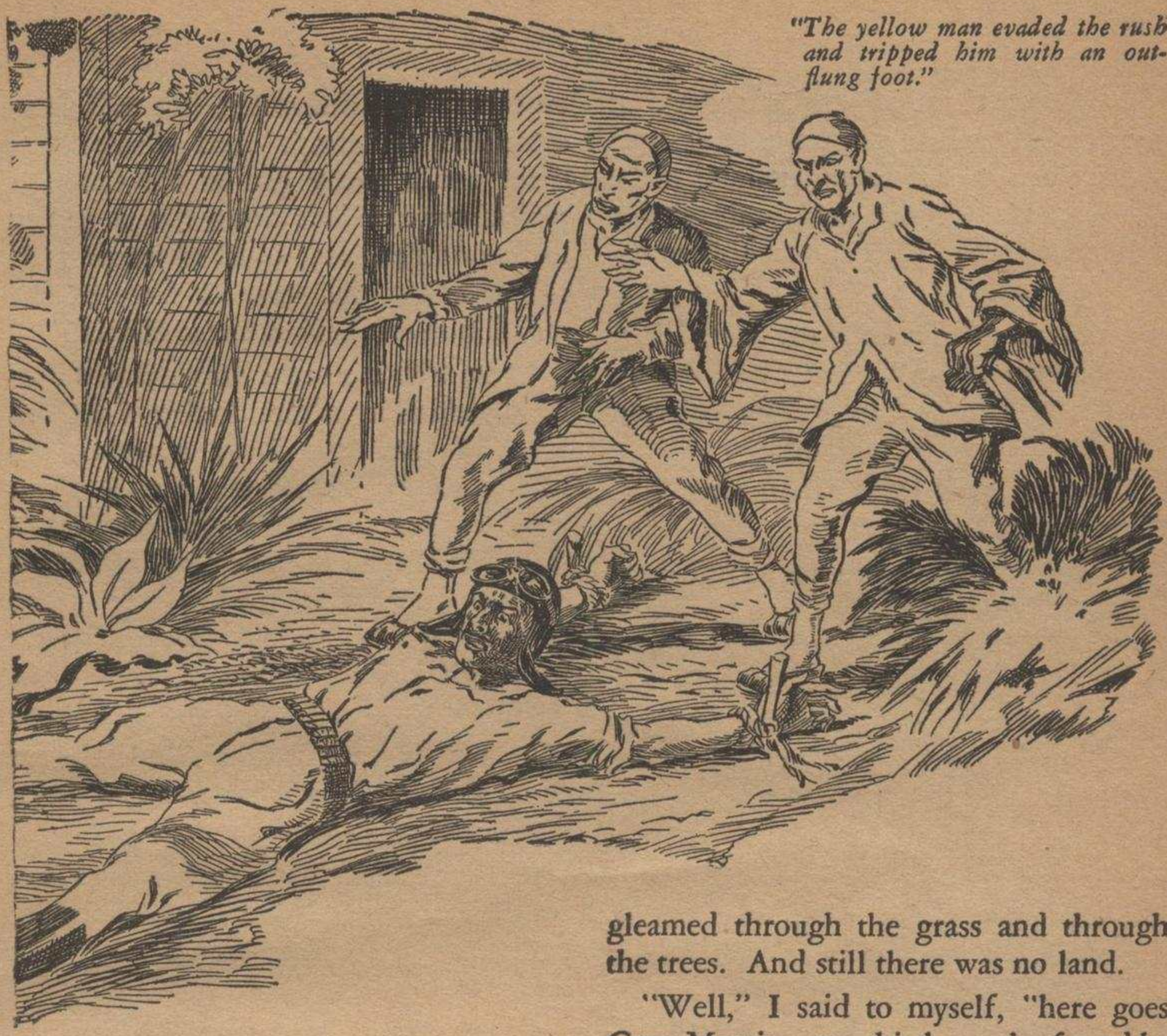
# The Dust of Death

## *By* HUGH JEFFRIES

*Gigantic puffballs—a scourge of death from fungi—the evil genius of a Chinese scientist—and the dread death that menaced America*

ONE man dreamt of empire, and half a million Americans died. One yellow man aided by the stolen brains of a white man of science came close to wiping out of existence the civilization of North America. One man against a hundred and thirty million—odds enough—yet that one man was Doctor Tsu Liang, and on his side was the fungoid scourge. Fighting for him were the puffball and the death that turned men into walking vegetables until at last it killed them—half a million.

It seems strange to write dispassionately about it now. It is difficult to start from the small beginnings to describe the growth of that great menace which held the United States helpless while cancer-



*"The yellow man evaded the rush and tripped him with an outflung foot."*

like it ate further and further into its vitals. Yet that is my task and I shall try to fulfil it.

Out of small beginnings—yes, things start out of small beginnings. An accident; a careless mechanic at the Miami airport saved the United States. For it was the result of his negligence that my motor conked out, and there I was two thousand feet up and no landing-place within fifty miles, as far as I could see. For I was over the Everglades. And below me were mud and water; tall reeds and more water, stunted, twisted trees standing in water—water—that is all I could see. Certainly no firm land.

I circled the bus over a mile radius, while the wind whistled a sharp dirge through the edge of a piece of loose isinglass at the cowling. Still the water gleamed through the grass and through the trees. And still there was no land.

"Well," I said to myself, "here goes Greg Morris—may his bones be found by other than by alligators." And I swooped down upon an open glade of water-covered marsh.

Flamingoes, a dozen lanky-legged pink birds, rose with a burst of flapping wings. Blue and white herons squawked alarm as I glided down upon them. Ten feet from the treacherous surface I levelled off. I brought the nose up and tried to pancake softly into the mud.

I remember feeling the ripping tear as the undercarriage broke off my Swallow. And then my head snapped forward against the instrument panel.

It must have been an hour later when I came to. Swarms of mosquitoes had settled on my face and on the back of my neck. I believe that it was the pain of their bites that brought me back to consciousness, for my head was on fire.

I brushed them off and gingerly felt myself, but apart from an aching weal right over my eyes found nothing to be wrong. My helmet and unbreakable glasses had saved me from punishment.

So far, so good. I unhooked my safety belt and put a leg outside the cowling. A huge brown buzzard croaked in dismay and clumsily flopped away from the wing tip where he had been sitting.

"Not yet, brother," I called after him. "Come again later on."

It was not a pretty prospect. For almost exactly a hundred yards around me was nothing but grass and reeds whose tops bore cottony seed pods. Under them was ooze, black mud which bubbled every so often as if something was drowning under it. And the gas that came up smelled of rotten things.

I looked over the Swallow and found that the right lower wing was broken and trailing along one side. The wheels and the undercarriage were just back of the tail, only a stub of bright red painted metal showing where they were sinking in the ooze. No, decidedly not a pretty prospect. And to make it worse, as I reached for my cigarette case, I found only two butts left. An ugly outlook.

And yet within five minutes it changed. Distantly I heard a halloo. I looked around but saw no one. Then I thought of the pistol I always carried in the plane, found it, and sent three shots into the sky.

Again came the cry. Then silence for a few minutes and again repeated. This time it was much nearer. Once more I blazed away three cartridges and lit my last cigarette. Apparently the Everglades were not quite as deserted as I had imagined. Already somebody who had seen me descend was coming to the rescue.

There was a final yoo-hoo—and then a red canoe eeled its way through the trees on one side. A red canoe, just as if from some summer camp. And what's more there was a pretty girl in the canoe; a girl whose fair hair shone like a golden helmet on her head; a girl whose dress of silk was just the same as those of the girls I had left behind me at Miami.

True, with her was a dark-skinned man who wielded a paddle. Indian, I decided when I saw the long straight hair falling to his shoulders. But my eyes were on the girl and stayed on her, as she smiled impishly and called "Welcome to the Everglades," when the canoe bumped gently against the torn right wing as if it was a landing-stage.

I threw up my hands in mock despair. "Out of character," I said, "entirely out of character. You should be wearing buckskin or—or——"

"Alligator hide," she suggested with a twinkle. "They tell me it's fashionable, and deer are rather scarce here, you know."

That is how I was rescued. The girl was Polly Houlton. The Indian was Joe Big, a Seminole working for the Houltons in the Everglades. Me—I was Greg Morris, gentleman of leisure, God save the mark, but most at ease in a 'plane, though not in one such as the Swallow was at that moment.

## 2

CAREFULLY I lifted my club bag out of the forward cockpit into the canoe and then climbed down myself. The wonder of seeing a pretty girl dressed as Polly Houlton was in the midst of the Everglades had not yet died down.

"But how can you dress that way—bare arms and all?" I voiced the question aloud. "By rights you should be all bloated with mosquito poison."

The girl laughed. And yet was she

merry? The laugh seemed to have a feeling of bitterness in it.

"I'm afraid that if any 'skeeter bit me now he'd just naturally curl up and die. I've got enough of their virus in me to be immune from swelling." Then with a touch of recklessness she added, "You can't live here for two years without getting your system used to mosquitoes."

"Two years!" I gasped. "You don't mean to say—you can't mean that you've been buried here for two years?"

"Buried—yes, that's a good word," she said. "And it's exactly what I do mean. It is two years since I saw any one outside our research group or a few occasional Indians."

"Research group!" The words had a strange sound. What kind of research could be going on in the Everglades? What kind of research that would keep a beautiful young woman confined to the swamps for two years?

I asked. And for a moment I thought that I'd asked in vain. For the girl stared straight ahead and through me, while her eyes seemed to fill with horror and loathing. For a minute she was dumb and then she dug her paddle into the water with furious energy.

"I hate it. I hate it all," she burst out. "I want to get away from them. I—I'm afraid of Doctor Tsu Liang. You are a flyer. Will you take me away when your airplane is fixed? Will you take me north to New York? I want to see Father there."

The request startled me. The rescuer wanting to be rescued. But the girl gave me no time for a reply.

"I am sure things are going wrong here," she cried. "I am sure that Dad wouldn't approve. And Tom—he's my brother—he's acting so queerly that I think he must have been drugged or hypnotized or something by the doctor. I want to get away from them."

I was stunned. What mess had I fallen into?

And then a new voice broke in. "Yellow man he's devil," said deep tones behind me. "He's devil. Me—I know! All devils." The canoe leaped forward again.

It was the Indian, Joe Big, who had spoken.

Polly Houlton laughed nervously. "Poor Joe doesn't understand what they are doing," she said. "It is weird enough, too, in a way. You see Father had an idea that he could turn the Everglades to great economic value by growing mushrooms here. And then he became interested in experiments with polarized light on fungoid growth and some strange chemical which he has made up.

"He calls it accelerating fungoid development, and already he has some puffballs that are close to four feet in diameter. That is what the Indians can't understand, and then, of course, they don't like Doctor Tsu Liang and his servants.

"Doctor Tsu came to us a year ago from the University of South China, where he had heard about the work that Father was doing. Father, you know, is Professor Howard Houlton, who used to be at Columbia."

"*The* Professor Houlton?" I asked, for even to an idle rich man's son the fame of the noted savant was familiar.

"Yes, people call him that," admitted Polly Houlton. "But he's away now and has been for the past two months, and Doctor Tsu is concentrating with Tom on some creepy experiments with a fungus that attacks caterpillars and turns them into vegetables. The Chinese eat those things," she said with a shudder.

I knew. I had seen the delicacy at a

Chinese dinner which I once attended. It is an ivory-white caterpillar about five inches long. And I remembered even then with horror the pale whitish stem that rose from immediately behind the caterpillar's head and ended in a little club-shaped spore-container.

Polly Houlton was speaking. "He—I—the doctor seems to be concentrating on this awful fungus and—I don't know—but I heard him talk with my brother once, and they seemed to think that it would be good to, what they call 'enlarge its scope of action,' whatever that means."

I shuddered in sympathy with her at the foul horror of which she was talking, and then instinctively ducked to the bottom of the canoe.

Something had splintered the gunwale less than an inch from my left hand, and then had buzzed venomously into the reeds. I knew what it was, although there was no report from any firearm. It was a bullet, a bullet fired from a pistol or rifle with a silencer fitted to it.

## 3

POLLY HOULTON and Joe Big had stopped paddling. For a moment the canvas canoe hissed on through the reeds and grass, and then it lost way.

"Who shoot?" bellowed the Indian. "This Joe Big and Miss Polly."

His voice seemed to die away in the steamy heat, and then I heard a distant splashing and the knock of a paddle against the side of a canoe. Somebody was coming.

Through a screen of reeds I caught a flash of deeper green. The reeds parted and a canoe slid into sight; a green canoe, and in it was a man wearing whites and a solar topee.

He came closer and I saw a yellow face. Black eyes stared at me intently, and I felt hostility in that gaze. Then an apologetic smile changed the man's appearance.

"I say, Miss Houlton," he called. "Most frightfully sorry. Didn't know you were about at all, and I just took a pot shot at a bally alligator. Sorry no end if I came near you."

Yellow skin and Oxford accent! Startling combination. I suppressed a smile.

Polly Houlton indignantly pointed at the white scar on the oaken gunwale.

"You came close to killing our guest. Too close for comfort," she snapped angrily. "You were not trying to discourage egret-hunters from coming too close to the island again, were you?"

Again the Oriental apologized.

"Please don't be angry," he said, his eyes soft on Miss Houlton. "Awful damn' fool, I admit, to be shooting without making sure of where you were. And it won't happen again. 'Pon my word it won't."

And then he swung to me and stretched out a brown muscular hand as the canoes rubbed sides.

"I can guess who you are," he said with a smile under his little black mustache. "You must be the aviator whose airplane I saw coming down. I hope you have not bunged up your machine too badly?"

"It's done for," I said bluntly. "I don't see how I can repair the undercarriage in this marsh. Anyway, it would need pontoons to get out."

"So sorry," lisped the Chinese. "But I fear that Miss Houlton still is angry with me. She has forgotten introductions. I am Doctor Tsu Liang. And you?"

"Gregory Morris," I said. "Long Island. Flying from Miami to Fort Myers when my engine died."

"Ah, so?" smiled the Chinaman. "Too

dashed bad for you, yet, what shall I say? —lucky for us that you—ah—dropped in on us. We have few visitors, you know, and we'll try to make you comfortable at the laboratories. But now we should hurry if we wish to be home in time for tea."

And so the Oriental dipped his paddle and drew ahead of us through the curtaining reeds.

Polly Houlton saw my raised eyebrows. She laughed. A strained laugh it was. "He was educated in England," she said in answer to the question on the tip of my tongue.

Joe Big spat viciously overboard. "Red," he grunted, "red no good for color. Boat show up too far. No good." Then he paddled on.

THREE times in the course of the next half-hour our canoe halted at the upraised hand of Doctor Tsu Liang. Three times we waited while his rifle slowly stole up to his shoulder. Each time a compressed "thutt" sounded like a muffled sneeze, to be followed at once by angry thrashings among the reeds where the Chinese scientist had spied an alligator.

"You know, Miss Houlton," the Oriental once called back over his shoulder, "this, in a way, is a revenge I am taking for your dog. I am sure poor Prince has been killed by one of them. They like dogs very well."

Polly Houlton turned pale. "Oh, I hope not," she cried. "Prince has been here long enough to learn how to avoid them. He can scent one a hundred yards away.

"I was looking for Prince when I saw your 'plane come down," she confided to me in an aside. "He's an Irish setter of whom I'm very fond, and he's been missing for the last two days. And for days before that he seemed dopy and strange. I'm afraid he's crawled away somewhere to die."

And then, with hardly any warning, I saw firm ground on one side. I craned around and saw a tree-covered island, no higher than four or five feet above the marsh at its highest point.

The canoes were making for a stoutly built wooden landing-stage. We climbed out and proceeded up a well-worn path that led around patches of palmetto and bristling stands of cane to the center of the island, where I saw a group of buildings and the metal skeletons of large and complicated pieces of apparatus in an open sandy glade.

A long sprawling building in the Spanish style seemed to be our goal, a long building crouching under gigantic cypress trees and in an ordered wilderness of scarlet poinsettias and flowering oleanders.

The path wound between clumps of bushes and Doctor Tsu Liang preceded us by some ten yards. He was out of sight for a moment and I heard the "thutt" of his rifle. Then we rounded a bush and he was in sight once more, his rifle lifted and pointed toward the left.

"Don't look," he called to Polly Houlton. "Another one of the slimy brutes —right on our grounds here. I see that I'll have to wage a campaign of extermination against them soon." He took her arm and mine and hurried us past the bush.

The next few feet brought us to the patio, where Joe Big dropped my bag and vanished. Then we were in a cool hall furnished with wicket armchairs and chaise-longues.

A clap of the hands and a gigantic Chinese clad in black trousers and shirt coat shuffled into the room.

"Hung Lee, my Number One boy,"

Doctor Tsu Liang waved his hand gracefully. "Anything you want, he will get. I am sure Miss Houlton will excuse me if I assume the part of host and tell you that everything in our poor household is at your disposal."

"A smoke," I suggested. "I've burned my last butt."

"Well, ra-ather," said Tsu Liang. "Why didn't you mention it before?" His hand held out a golden cigarette case. "And how about a cooling drink, a most charming drink that I've found down here—a—a mint julep, what? Two of them, Lee, and a lime crush for Miss Houlton, what?"

And so, five minutes later, I was puffing luxuriously and looking with unbelieving eyes at the tall and fragrant glass that I held moisture-beaded in my hand.

So this was the man of whom Polly Houlton was so terribly afraid—this man who seemed to combine in himself the perfect courtesy of two civilizations.

Half an hour later I was in the room to which the doctor had himself conducted me, and I was looking at the dinner jacket which a deft-handed Chinese had taken out of my bag and laid on the bed as a hint of what was expected for the evening meal.

"Good Lord," I thought to myself. "Formality in the middle of the Everglades!"

I heard a soft tapping on the door—tapping such as somebody drumming his fingernails on the wood makes. And then, before I could call out, the door silently opened.

Joe Big stood there, glowering at me. From his hand swung a burlap bag. Silently still he closed the door and beckoned to me with a swarthy finger.

"Yellow man shoot 'gator outside house," he said in a husky whisper. "See—look at 'gator."

A twitch of his wrist and out rolled what was in the sack. It was a dog, a silky-haired brown setter; its head squashed by the blow of a blunt-nosed bullet, but—the horror will not leave me yet—immediately behind its skull rose a blood-spattered something. A horn—no, it was a stub of pale yellow fungus, an inch in diameter and six in height.

I shrunk from it with a cry of revulsion. My stomach protested at the sight. It was—there was no doubt about it—it was the same horrible fungus which attacked the wretched caterpillars thought such a delicacy by the Chinese.

"My God!" I cried. "What does this horrible thing mean?"

My eyes were questioning Joe Big.

The Indian shrugged his shoulders. "Yellow man is devil. I say so before," he whispered. "Look, feel, dog Prince still warm. No flies in him. He live with that thing growing in him, but he die too, just like trees with Spanish moss or air plant die."

I could not bear to feel the wretched body. Yet I knew the Indian to have spoken truth. If I remembered correctly the explanation of a Chinese friend, at the dinner where I first saw the fungoid monstrosity, the body of the animal should be filled with the mycelium roots, the actual body of the fungus. The projecting spike would only be the spore cap—the fruit of the horrible plant.

"Look," the Indian was merciless in his observations. "See the rope around neck of Prince. Dog he tied up some place. He chew rope. He break it. He crawl to door to see Miss Polly and he get shot. See—look."

I looked. I saw. The Indian was right. A grim rage against the unclean work of the Chinese began to rise in me.

The Indian was rolling the body of Prince back into the sack.

"What are you going to do with it?" I cried angrily.

"Take him back where he killed," answered Joe Big simply. "Yellow devil find him there. Not know that we know. Give you time. Got to have time to take you and Miss Polly away. Ten other men here call yellow devil chief. I go now."

Joe Big did not wait for my consent. He opened the door and noiselessly slipped out. In truth I did not know what to say. Ten other Chinese here, all servants of Doctor Tsu Liang. No wonder that Polly Houlton wanted to escape. Escape! But how?

## 4

I MET Tom Houlton, Polly's brother, a few minutes after Joe Big had left me. It seemed to me that the horror which the Indian had brought into my room had tainted the air there, and I was driven out into the sunny patio, where I walked up and down while trying to find an escape for Miss Houlton and myself from the island.

Several turns I made on the scarlet tiles, and then I saw a fair-haired young man, standing under the pillars at one side. The family resemblance was there, and I promptly went over and introduced myself.

Tom Houlton showed no curiosity about my coming and no interest in plans for going. He simply stood there and toyed with a cigarette while I tried to make conversation and judge whether to tell him of his sister's appeal to me. His pale gray eyes, slightly bulging, stared dully at me, until I felt a shiver run down my spine, for there was something terribly inhuman about them.

I talked of this and that, but could rouse no interest in him until I asked him to explain the nature of the work on which he and Doctor Tsu Liang were engaged.

Then there rose a gleam of vivacity in his face and for a few minutes Tom Houlton was really animated.

"Come along with me," he suggested. "I'll show you our culture sheds where we ray the mycelium and the spores, and where we use the chemical fungoid stimulator that Dad has discovered."

I walked with him across an area of sand that was white and powdery and dry as salt and saw that we were under one of the frameworks which bore a number of disks, now shielded with black cloth.

"Mirrors," he said, "catching my wondering gaze. "It's complex to explain to a layman, but they are of special material and curvature. They catch the polarized light of the moon, from which we separate out certain wave lengths by means of color screens and prisms.

"The wave lengths are the ones we find most suitable for our work, and they are concentrated on certain beds in whatever one of our fungus houses we are working.

"Look," he pointed to the intricate branching of the mechanism and to a number of chain-drive belts as well as to an electric motor at the base of the central column.

"That's our clockwork system—electric, of course—which keeps the mirrors following the motion of the moon so that we can be sure of our rays as long as there is moonlight. It is practically the same as that you will find in any large astronomical observatory where the telescope can be mechanically set to follow the motion of a celestial body that has to be studied for any length of time."

I nodded understanding and Tom Houlton continued talking, addressing me as if I was a classroom audience and he the lecturer.

His face shone with interest as he went into details of construction and operation —details which I have forgotten. Yet even then there was something strange about his actions; something theatrical and exaggerated about his gestures.

"You have doubtless heard old-fashioned beliefs that corn and wheat should be sown in the full of the moon," he stated. "It is an ancient superstition and one spread all over the world. It is often found bound up with various religions, and I am sure that your and my ancestors were very careful to observe it.

"They did rightly in doing so," he cried loudly. "For the moon, fair Luna, is more than mistress of the skies. She helps, when she chooses, in the germination of seeds, in the growing of plants, and no type of vegetable matter does she control more than the fungi. It is by making the most of her aid that we succeed in what we are doing. We have analyzed her light, which, as I have said, is polarized. That is, all the rays are parallel, as they would be when reflected from a mirror, and the moon, of course, is the mirror of the sun. We have taken out those rays which are valuable—and here you see the result."

We had reached a low shed, whose wooden walls, now down, evidently could be lifted like shutters at night to give the moon rays access. Tom Houlton threw open a door.

Dim light and musty odor met me, also heat as of a bake oven. I entered, and, as my eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom, I saw a long row of huge white balls.

I knew what they were, for I remembered what Polly Houlton had said. Yet even so it seemed incredible that these objects, some of them three feet in diameter and others four feet, should be the same as the ordinary edible puffballs, the largest of which grow to but little more than ten inches in section.

"These puffballs are eatable, of course," continued Tom Houlton. "They are the finest of foods. And we have already succeeded in accelerating them to such a point that one of the big ones will mature in forty-eight hours. They weigh about four hundred pounds apiece when ripe as these are now, and can undoubtedly be made the world's cheapest food."

"What do you mean by 'accelerated'?" I asked. "I thought that your ordinary puffball would mature in less than forty-eight hours anyway."

Tom Houlton smiled as one of my teachers used to smile when he saw glimmerings of intelligence in my class.

"Quite right, quite right," he said. "But you must remember that the larger any vegetable object is, the longer it took to attain that size. That's a general rule, and of course there are exceptions. But we had to overcome that condition, else insect pests might riddle our puffballs before they grew large enough, and we believe we have succeeded even to the extent of passing on that acceleration to several generations of the mushroom."

We walked through the shed past rows of the puffballs, which to my startled imagination seemed to be swelling and growing bigger even as I watched them; came to the end of it, and walked out through another door.

Listlessly Tom Houlton waved his hand toward other and similar buildings stretching away on the burning sand from under the palm trees.

"You've seen all there is to see," he said in a colorless voice. "The other buildings are all the same. All have puffballs in various stages of growth and drying. All are due to our silver lady of the night."

His voice for an instant regained its

freshness, and in that moment I visioned him as the high priest of some pagan cult that worshipped Selene, the goddess of the moon. Surely in those few seconds he had on his face some of the high zeal of the priest.

But then I thought of something else. I thought of another superstition connected with the moon. And rashly I put it into words.

"My grandmother used to tell me not to sleep with the moonlight shining on my face," I said. "She was certain that the moonbeams would steal my wits away —and they might have some effect too. Isn't the word 'lunatic' derived from the Latin *'luna'*, for 'moon'?"

I regretted my words a moment after I had spoken them. Tom Houlton's face was contorted into a mask of rage. Before I could guard myself he leaped at me and tripped me to the ground. I struck heavily and then was fighting for my life, for his hands were gripped tight around my throat and his thumbs were pressing on my windpipe.

My fall had half dazed me, yet I clasped my hands together under those of Houlton and with all my strength struck out, forcing his hands apart and breaking his hold on my throat.

Deep lungfuls of air I drew with sobbing breath and then scrambled to my feet again to ward off Houlton should he resume his mad attack.

But Houlton was lying on the sand. A thin trickle of blood came from his nose and mouth. Suddenly frightened, I stooped over him. I loosened his collar and put my hand inside his shirt to feel whether his heart was beating.

And at that precise instant I heard the shrill of a whistle and the patter of running feet. Before I could turn around I felt a savage impact of knees in the small of my back, and I was flung several feet away.

Hands gripped me and twisted my arms painfully behind my back. And then I was unceremoniously jerked to my feet and turned about.

Before me stood Doctor Tsu Liang, a little golden whistle shaped like a section of bamboo rod in the fingers of one hand and a stubby automatic pistol in the other.

"Now, now, Mr. Morris," he purred. "How am I to interpret this unprovoked attack of yours upon my colleague? No —don't deny it. I saw it all, and I say that it was unprovoked. Allow me to hope that poor Tom is not as badly injured as he looks. For if it should happen that he dies—I may decide that summary justice here would be better than that strange legal farce which you hold in the United States in cases of murder."

He broke off into a swift flow of Chinese. I felt the hands of his servants pulling out the automatic from my hip pocket. And then I was being half pushed and half carried toward a back entrance of the house.

Dumb with dismay at the turn of fate and the treachery of the Celestial, I allowed myself to be hustled down a flight of stairs. And then I was thrown headlong into a cellar whose thick oaken door closed out all light as well as hope of escape when it was slammed and locked.

5

How many hours I crouched there in that coral rock walled cellar I can not tell. My wrist-watch had been broken in the struggle and the luminous hands were stopped by the jagged glass. There was no light. There was no window. Even the door was almost air-tight, and after I had sat on the cold floor for —it must have been hours only, although it seemed like days—I began to fear that

the air was becoming vitiated and that I would die from lack of oxygen.

Horrors enough there were on mushroom island, but this thought—that I would choke to death; that like a rat in a trap I might be dead before I was sought for again—nearly drove me frantic.

I groped to the door and threw my body against it until the bolts that studded it bit deeply into my flesh. The door was as firm as rock. I shouted for help, and my voice filled the cellar with sound. Again and again I shouted, and then managed to hold myself back from the brink of hysteria.

"I've got to stay sane," I muttered to myself. "I've got to keep my senses."

And so I drew off one shoe, leaned against the door and started flailing it with the heel. Somebody, surely, would hear the noise of my knocking. Somebody would come down and open the door. That was all I wanted.

I beat the door, using my right hand until it was tired. Then I changed to my left. And then back again to the right. Nobody came. Then I started counting the strokes. My pounding became a grim game. I swore that I would knock a thousand times more. I did. The number passed and I kept on pounding. My right shoe had split and broken. I pulled off my left and resumed the hammering. The noise must have drowned all others in my ears, for I heard no one approach the cellar. Yet suddenly a key grated in the lock. Tumblers clicked, and the door was flung open. I crouched head down, blinded by the glare of a high-powered electric torch. I tensed myself for a leap.

"I wouldn't do it, if I were you," advised Doctor Tsu Liang from behind the source of radiance. I saw a gleaming pistol barrel moved into the light for an instant, and then withdrawn.

"You are a bally persistent blighter," he continued. "That confounded knocking of yours got on my nerves, and was too hard to explain to Miss Houlton."

I caught at the straw. "Then she doesn't know that you've imprisoned me here?" I cried.

A slow chuckle came from behind the light.

"I decided that it would save trouble if I said that you had rushed off into the swamp after killing Tom Houlton."

"He—he is dead!" I faltered.

"Yes—what does the poem say?—you now see in me the lord of all I survey. But then, of course, you really can not see me."

"But how could I have killed him?" I cried. "You know that I only hit him once, and that was to save my own life, for he was strangling me. How could he have died from that?"

"With your rough temper you spoiled a very pretty experiment I was making," said Doctor Tsu Liang. "I'm afraid poor Tom was already considerably weakened by it, and of course I realize that his mental condition may have affected the course of the experiment. Therefore I am, in a way, rather glad that I find in you good raw material to take Tom's place. You may consider it a form of expiation, don't you know, to take Tom Houlton's place."

Sickening misgivings were stirring in me. Somehow I knew what the answer would be to my question. Yet I asked it.

"What do you mean?" I cried.

"I heard your conversation with poor Tom before the—the murder." The fiend laughed when he saw me wince at the term.

"I heard your remark about the old superstition that moonlight has an effect

on the mind. 'Out of the mouths of babes'—you know the context of the quotation. You had put your finger on the one element which I saw was upsetting the experiment. Tom Houlton had been so zealous in working over his father's bally puffballs that he had exposed himself for many hours at a time to our refined rays.

"And if they affect fungoid generation and development why should they not also affect the mind? I am quite satisfied that they do, and that poor Tom was well on the way to becoming insane. And that, of course, was unfair to my experiment. I thank the spirits of my ancestors and my native caution that I exposed myself as little as possible to the rays.

"But the experiment? Of course that is what you asked me about. I will tell you, for doubtless you will have the honor of being the first American to bring my pet fungus to complete fruition. I shall administer certain cultivated spores to you, and we will see what will happen. I had already done so to Tom—oh no, he didn't suspect it—and I think that he died so easily because the fungus had already sapped his strength to a great degree."

Cold perspiration ran down from my forehead, and then with a cry of desperate rage I leaped at the mocking voice behind the light. I saw a spurt of fire and felt a sharp impact on my face. And then I was choking, strangling in the acrid fumes of the liquid that spattered my chin. I felt a blackness descending upon my mind. The torch seemed to recede to a tiny pin-point of light, and far, far in the distance I heard the mocking laugh of the yellow man.

*6*

THE world was red. It swirled into whirlpools of blood which attracted me. I struggled against them, and yet I dived through the center of one vortex after the other. And the blood changed to fire; to orange flames which licked at my body and burned it.

I screamed with agony and opened my eyes. I was in glaring sunlight. I was lying in the hot sand. To either side of me I could see one of the long mushroom culture sheds.

My mind was still whirling, and I was terribly sick with a nausea that I had never felt before. I tried to roll over onto one side but found that I could not. I was staked spread-eagle fashion on the hot sand.

Then a shadow fell across my body. It was that of Doctor Tsu Liang, who stood comfortably at ease in his spotless linen and sun helmet, while he regarded me with the calm interest of the vivisector studying a bound puppy.

"Ah," he said, "you are awake? That's excellent, Mr. Morris, excellent! It shows that you have a robust constitution. Other men that I have been forced to shoot with my little gas pistol generally take the full twenty-four hours to come around. You took but twenty. It means that you will provide most excellent material for my study."

My tongue was a piece of sandy leather. It rattled against my teeth. Yet I managed a tight-lipped grin and a few words.

"Hope you'll find a Chinese hell as hot as this," I croaked.

"Well—really!" Tsu Liang cried out in tones of shocked protest. "I thought that you had resigned yourself to expiate your offense. This is no torture, allow me to assure you. Warmth, intense warmth may help the success of our little experiment, though I doubt if it is absolutely necessary. That is why I had you put in that position, which, I admit, may be a trifle irksome."

Painfully and with great effort I began to curse. I thought of the vilest names that a man could be called, and I used them. I cursed Tsu Liang and his father and mother. With great detail I described what refuse his ancestors had been and what kind of offal they were now. I stopped only when I had no more breath.

Tsu Liang was laughing quietly. "How childish, how very childish of you!" he choked through his merriment. "I suppose you had an idea that I would lose my temper and kill you quickly? But you do not know me yet. And for your information, I may as well tell you that English is a poor language to swear in. You have not the wealth of imagery to be effective. I wish that you could live long enough to learn Cantonese. You would appreciate the difference.

"Don't think," he gibed, "that I'm merely trying to torture you. I have sent one of my boys away to bring me the choicest of the accelerated Cordyceps fungi I have. It is a fungus which attacks caterpillars in my country and it has grown to ripeness on a dog which I was forced to use.

"It is its spores which I wish to sow in you, although I am doubtful of the exact method to follow. In the case of Tom Houlton I fed them directly into the blood stream. He cut his finger rather badly about a week ago, and was trusting enough to let me bandage it."

I heard a noise in one of the adjoining sheds and tore the skin off both my wrists in a wild effort to pull the stakes from the sand, for I knew that it must be the Celestial's servant coming with the horrible caterpillar fungus.

"You might try breathing in the spores," continued the yellow man musingly. "Though I doubt whether it would serve unless you had some lung disease or a sore throat bad enough to have broken the membranes. Ah—I have it! I must burst a ripened puffball before you. One of my men nearly choked to death last week when he touched one off. The spores are very much like snuff, you know, and they irritate the throat and lungs most mightily. By Jove"—he was rapt in admiration of his new idea—"why, that would be absolutely perfect. The puffballs can prepare the way and the Cordyceps can follow. It's perfect——"

I heard a rush of feet behind me and an exclamation of surprize from the Chinese. Somehow I twisted my neck and saw—saw Tom Houlton, or his shade, charging head down like a bull at Doctor Tsu Liang.

Agile as a toreador the yellow man evaded the rush and tripped Houlton with an outflung foot. Houlton sprawled and fell, but turned even as he was falling and so received on his coat sleeve the charge of liquid gas which had been flung at his face from Tsu Liang's pistol. He seemed to bound like a rubber ball from the ground and once more came hurtling at the Celestial, this time butting him on the chest and falling to the sand on top of him.

One hand, I saw, was gripping the yellow man's little pistol, while the poison saturated sleeve was pressed against the Chinese savant's mouth.

There followed a brief struggle and then I saw Doctor Tsu Liang's body go limp, and, tied as I was, I could not help chuckling at the poetic justice of his capture with the very poison which he himself had discharged.

But the next instant my fears were once more aroused, for I knew the potency of the strange liquid used by the Oriental. And Houlton was scrambling to his feet much too slowly.

"Houlton," I husked. "Houlton! Throw

off your coat. Take it off. It's got poison gas liquid on it. Quick, man, before it gets you. Quick!"

Tom Houlton turned his face to mine, and I saw that he understood. He wavered to his feet and drew off his coat, dropped it near Doctor Tsu Liang, and then leaned against one of the sheds while his chest heaved convulsively.

"I heard. I was in the next shed," he gasped. "I heard what that dog had done to me. I know what that means. I—I am a walking dead man."

Madness and sanity too, and the knowledge of his awful doom were tragically visible in Houlton's eyes.

GRADUALLY he breathed easier and came over to me. He cut the cords that bound me to the stakes, and then stared intently at me, as if he was trying to remember who I was.

"My head!" He cried suddenly and lifted both hands to his temples. "My head aches. But I know you. You are the flyer who disappeared yesterday afternoon. Polly was looking for you most of the night in the marsh. The doctor said you had run away because of something—something."

And then I saw both memory and complete sanity return at once.

"I remember now," he said slowly. "I hit you. I must have been out of my head. Maybe this vile thing that Tsu Liang has done to me is already affecting my mind.

"I hit you. We struggled, and then I fainted. I am not as strong as I used to be. And you had run away when I woke up. You were in the marsh somewhere. And this morning we were sure that you had been either drowned or killed by the alligators. Now I find you here. I suppose that Tsu Liang had you kept prisoner somewhere by his men?"

"Yes," I said. "His servants overpowered me. He said that I had killed you and that he was going to make me take your place as—as experimental material."

Tom Houlton paled and swayed. "Yes—that's right. That's what I heard him say," he half whispered. "It's true, then. It's true. It isn't a dream like all those other dreams I have been living for the past few weeks."

Suddenly he gripped my arm. "You must escape," he muttered. "You must take Polly away with you; take her north to her father. Joe Big, the Indian, will help you."

"And what about yourself?" I asked. "Why not come with us? Maybe there is some way of stopping the growth of this thing."

For a moment I thought that Tom Houlton would agree, but then he shook his head resolutely.

"I know," he said quietly. "I know what is wrong with me. And that can never, never be cured. I shall die, anyway, within the week, and if I came with you I would bear the spawn of death behind my head. I would pollute the world with millions of spores. No. I know my duty. I will attend to it. I shall wipe out this devil's mess which I have helped——"

A startled yell and a high-pitched gibbering in Chinese interrupted him. A dungaree-clad Oriental was advancing upon us with a gleaming knife in his hand. I could hear other falsetto cries answering him.

Swiftly I scooped up the poison gun that lay by Doctor Tsu Liang's hand, and fired at the Chinese. A wet stain splashed his blue overalls on the chest, and he collapsed on the sand.

"To the house," I ordered Tom Houlton. "Quick to your sister. We have to get away from these Chinese."

And then began a deadly game of hide-and-go-seek between Tom Houlton and me on one side and the yellow men who

owed allegiance only to Doctor Tsu Liang.

Time and again we escaped detection only by the narrowest of margins as we dodged toward the shrubbery that surrounded the house. Once I felled a Chinese before he could give the alarm by hitting him with a huge conch shell that I had found. I used it as a knuckle-duster, for the pistol was noisy, besides being precious.

At length we were in the shrubbery while the Chinese still searched with excited cries in and around the mushroom sheds. We crawled through it, once seeing a venomous little coral snake flash away from the spot where I was just about to put my hand. And then we were ten yards from the patio.

"Listen, before we go in," Tom Houlton grasped my sleeve. "Don't tell Polly about—about what's the matter with me—I don't want to hurt her. I'll pretend that I'll go with you—only I won't."

His gray eyes were pleading on mine, while a muscle in his left cheek twitched with emotion.

"All right, Houlton," I said. "You've got more guts than I have if you intend to stay here."

"You have forgotten that I am a dead man," said Tom Houlton harshly. "Dead—except that I can take revenge before I die. It takes no courage now, for I intend to kill myself—feed the alligators—burn in one of the sheds—anything, rather than become a walking vegetable to further the ambitions of Tsu Liang."

There was nothing of the weakling, nothing of the muddled mind about Tom Houlton now. I could sense a steel-strong will as he continued in his whisper.

"I must tell you now, while my head is still clear, what I picked up by hints and by deduction from that yellow villain while I've been helping him with his experiments on the Cordyceps—the caterpillar death.

"God knows why I did not tell any one else before, or kill the treacherous dog. I believe he intends to release the deadly spores in several cities of the United States. I believe he has a great plan to wipe out all human life in our country and so create new land for colonization by the Chinese. That is his scheme—and I—God help me—I aided him although I suspected what he wanted to do." His voice broke with shame.

I was dazed by the far-reaching nature of the plan; by the devilish cunning of Tsu Liang.

"Promise me," Tom Houlton whispered insistently, "you'll take Polly away, and then you'll come back with Dad to check up on what I've done. Every spore of that caterpillar fungus must be destroyed, and even the puffballs are dangerous if left to spread unchecked."

"I promise," I whispered.

Then Tom Houlton had leaped forward and darted across the last patch of grass into the house. Ten seconds later I had joined him there.

"Quiet!" He breathed, with his finger to his lips, and tiptoed through the cool living-room. I followed, turned a corner into a passage and dashed the conch shell into the face of the gigantic Number One house boy who soundless on his slippers had come through an open door.

One prong of the heavy shell caught him on the temple and I distinctly heard the bone crush in. Then he toppled to the floor. A moment later Tom Houlton reappeared with his sister, who greeted me with a cry of surprize.

"Oh—how did you get here?" She chattered delightedly. But Tom Houlton stopped her with a broad palm which he laid gently over her mouth.

"Hush up," he whispered. "We must find Joe Big and get a canoe. We are escaping."

"Thank God," said Polly Houlton.

"Thank God you've decided at last. I'll find Joe Big. I know where he is."

She turned and ran down the passage while Tom Houlton and I dragged the body of the huge Chinese further into a corner whose darkness had hidden it from Polly when she met me.

"I must get some shoes for you, and Tsu Liang's rifle," panted Tom Houlton. "No time to lose."

He dashed into a room and emerged with the silencer-fitted rifle and a pair of shoes which I found to fit me while he was breaking open a box of cartridges and stuffing the shells into his pockets.

"Now let 'em all come," he crowed as he stepped to a window of the living-room which commanded a view of the mushroom sheds. The next instant I heard a startled oath from him.

"They're coming!" he cried. "Four of them. They're carrying Tsu Liang to the house."

Then I heard the muffled sneeze of the rifle. Once. Twice.

"Got one of them anyway," he gloated a moment later. "And I think I hit Tsu Liang too, but the others have dragged him behind shelter. I guess we'll have a few minutes now to get you into that canoe. Where is that Joe Big anyway?"

A pistol started firing from the mushroom sheds and two round little holes appeared, as if by magic, in one of the closed windows. The bullets buried themselves in the opposite wall.

POLLY, closely followed by Joe Big, ran into the room and cried out in relief at seeing that nobody was wounded. Houlton thrust his rifle at me.

"Watch out of the window," he said. "I want to talk to Joe Big."

I leaned against an embrasure and peered cautiously out of the window. The mushroom sheds swam in heat haze that shimmered like flowing water over the dazzling sand. But I could see no one.

Tom Houlton had taken Joe Big apart and was giving him orders. The Indian was objecting to something and Houlton was fiercely insistent until the Indian finally nodded his head.

Then Houlton called me. "Ready now. You three will make a dash down the path for the landing-stage; take one of the canoes and smash the other, and paddle around to the southeast point, where you'll have a clear view of the eastern sheds."

"But what about you?" cried Polly Houlton in alarm.

"You'll pick me up there. I've got something to do here after you leave."

"Let me help," I cried impulsively. "Two can do it better than one."

Tom Houlton grinned at me—a manly grin it was—and then put out his hand.

"Thanks for the offer," he said firmly. "But you know you have other duties. So long." I knew then that I had said good-bye to Tom Houlton. Good-bye in this life.

He pecked Polly on the cheek, cupped her golden head between his palms while he stared down into her eyes, and then warned her whimsically, "No protests now, young lady. There isn't time. And for once you do as you are told."

Then he flung off into a side passage while Joe Big herded Polly and me swiftly out of the house and through the bushes to the landing-stage.

## 7

WE GOT unobserved to the water and the Indian viciously drove his heel through the canvas bottom of the red canoe until it filled with water and sank down into the mud.

Polly Houlton and I had already scrambled into the green one and when Joe Big joined us we worked our way through the

tall reeds and grass to the southeastern tip of the island. Here, behind a screen of reeds we sat, watching the long row of sheds, Joe Big and I in silence and Polly in fidgeting anxiety.

Presently we saw Tom. He was carrying a five-gallon gasoline can in one hand and the rifle in the other. He poured gasoline along the baseboard of one long building which Polly identified as the spore shed—the place where ripe puffballs were kept in a moistened atmosphere so that their thick covers should not split and release the clouds of spores with which they were filled.

Joe Big contributed another piece of information.

"Wind from east," he said. "Fire burn up all sheds if it gets started."

Tom Houlton had already worked along one hundred feet of the narrow shed. He was close to the center point. Then we heard a yell of discovery and a group of blue-clad Chinese appeared a hundred yards away from him, rounding the corner of another building.

Houlton dropped the can, ran several yards toward the yellow men and then stooped to fumble with a match at the base of the shed. Flame—a long flickering pale yellow line—sprang up both before and behind him. The gasoline can exploded with a roar. Black smoke and liquid fire showered over the shed. For an instant Tom Houlton was hidden from us by the smoke, and then Polly screamed shrilly.

"He's burning—he's burning!"

Tom Houlton, his clothes afire in several places, was running toward the Chinese. His rifle was spitting death at them, and I heard their alarmed yells as they tumbled back into safety behind their corner.

Polly Houlton seized her paddle and drove the canoe toward shore.

"Cowards," she cried bitterly at Joe Big and me. "Why don't you do something to help him? Why don't you save him?"

Tom Houlton was still running along the wall of flame, which now roared twenty feet high. I could see that the back of his shirt was eaten away. I imagined that I caught flashes of his blackened skin and flesh. Then Houlton stopped. He examined the flame-hidden wall of the mushroom shed. He found what he was looking for, because his foot swung out and a rectangle of blackness appeared in the fire. He had kicked in a door.

For ten seconds, maybe, he stood looking into the shed, and then he turned toward us and saw the canoe almost touching the white sand of the island.

"Go back," he cried. His voice was unnaturally shrill over the roaring of the flames. "Go back—and say good-bye to Dad for me, Polly."

The girl in front of me screamed again and covered her eyes.

Tom Houlton had put the muzzle of the rifle into his mouth. He was poking the trigger with a stick. I saw a gush of smoke from the back of his head. The rifle fell from his hands, and Tom Houlton's body tumbled into the black aperture. He had fallen into the funeral pyre which he had lit for himself.

Polly Houlton's shoulders were shaking with sobs.

"Oh why—why did he have to do that?" she cried. "We could have picked him up."

Tenderly—as kindly as I could, I explained what was the matter with Tom Houlton, and how he had decided to kill himself rather than bring pollution upon the world. Joe Big grunted corroboration, for Tom Houlton had told him all in orders.

Her sobs ceased and her tears dried up as she listened, and when I had con-

cluded, the golden head sat proudly on her shoulders.

"It is the sort of thing I would expect of the Tom I used to know," she said firmly. "He did right, and Father and I will always be proud of him."

Vague dull explosions were coming from the burning mushroom shed. With each strange report a brown cloud gushed through the flames and swept westward with the wind.

"They are the dried puffballs exploding—bursting from the heat. Those are the spores," cried Polly in alarm. "Oh, I do hope that Tom's sacrifice was not in vain. I do hope that everything will be destroyed."

A group of Chinese, their mouths and noses enveloped by wet cloths, appeared once more. With them was a directing figure in clothes that before the fire had evidently been white. It was the evil genius of the island—Tsu Liang.

Whether there was some means of resuscitation from his poison gas that was known to his servants, or whether he had been put to sleep for but half an hour because he had only breathed the gas from Tom Houlton's sleeve, I can not tell.

Yet there he was, and evidently he was directing his men in salvaging some of the contents of the mushroom sheds. A bloody bandage wrapped around one forearm advertised where Tom Houlton's shots had found a mark.

Our canoe was in plain sight on the sandy beach. He saw it and instantly darted down the side of the flaming shed to where the rifle Tom Houlton had used lay on the sand.

"We go now," said Joe Big, rather hurriedly for the Indian.

He pushed off with his paddle. Four strokes and we were again among the reeds. A few more and we had changed our direction.

Bullets snapped through the reeds where we would have been but for the Indian's change of course.

"Green," he observed, "much better color for canoe than red."

It took eight hours of hard paddle work through a maze of channels that led through the Everglades to bring us to the cement causeway that runs through the marsh and bears the name of the Tamiami Trail.

Joe Big refused to come with us when Polly and I boarded a bus for Miami.

"You come back," he said bluntly. "You come back to kill yellow devil. You send telegram to my uncle Jim Blue at Fort Myers. He get me and I meet you. We go together and kill him."

Then he stepped into the canoe again and a moment later had vanished among the reeds.

## 8

POLLY and I had almost reached the end of our journey. One of the swiftest trains on the continent was bearing us through a district of back yards. Intimate snatches of squalid home life through unshuttered windows streamed past us like a strange film made up of unrelated snapshots. We were in New York. Soon we would be in the cathedral-like station.

Polly put the question which had been burning in my mind ever since we left the island of horror.

"What are you going to do, Greg?" Our friendship had progressed far by this time. "Doctor Tsu Liang is still alive. He has the island to himself now. I know that Tom did his best—but do you honestly believe that Tsu Liang has been made harmless—that his horrible plan to depopulate the United States is done for?"

I did not like to admit it. Yet I remembered the parting words of Joe Big. And the Indian had a strange faculty for

driving through cloudy arguments and thoughts to the core of truth.

"No!" I exploded. "Tsu Liang will be a danger until he is dead. I'm sure that his mind, too, is warped by those moonbeams of your father's. He will have to be dealt with."

The train had pulled up in the vaulted station, and we swept out with other passengers to the red-capped welcomers of New York. Barriers passed behind us, and then we saw the crowd of those who waited for friends and relatives.

Off to one side I saw a tall, white-haired man, slightly stoop-shouldered as one who spent much time over a microscope would be. I nudged Polly and she flung herself at him, laughing and crying at the same time.

It was Professor Howard Houlton. I recognized his face now, for I had seen it in the newspapers almost as often as that of the President.

Affectionately he greeted his daughter. He patted her glossy head. And then his keen eyes sternly examined me. I must have passed muster, for at last he smiled and thrust out his right hand.

"I am glad to know you," he said simply. "Your telegram said much, but I will want to talk to you at some length. You have a residence here?"

"The Yale Club, sir," I answered.

"Good," he said. "My temporary apartment is small. Can you come to see us for dinner? You will find my address in the telephone book. At seven o'clock, then."

"Very well, sir," I said.

A taxi was waiting for Professor Houlton, and I was crowded by a burly man as I handed Polly in to her father. The man stepped on my toes. He was as clumsy as a bear.

"Don't forget now—seven o'clock at our flat," cried Polly.

"Dead or alive," I answered dramatically, concealing my annoyance. "I shall be there."

The man who had bumped into me was standing only a foot or two away. A big man he was, hard hat, and dead cigar in the corner of his mouth.

"Stage police detective," I said to myself, and then, as he was obviously staring at me, I spoke to him.

"Did you want to talk to me?"

The fellow flushed and turned away. "Naw," he grunted. Then he was swallowed in the crowd.

I stared after him, marvelling at his insolence, and then summoned a cab for myself.

At the Yale Club I blessed my tailor for having sent two suits which I had ordered before leaving for my flying trip to the south. I wrote a check for Joe Big and mailed it to him in care of his uncle at Fort Myers, and then had a shower and changed into one of the new suits. Doctor Tsu Liang's little gas pistol I put into my coat pocket, for I had a strange feeling of uneasiness. The episode with the man at the station worried me a little.

Yet even so I was fool enough not to telephone a warning to Professor Houlton. How different things would have been had I done so! Half a million lives would have been saved.

I LEFT for the Houltons' flat in plenty of time. Yet the taxi became entangled in innumerable traffic jams, and I was fully ten minutes late when I drove up to the modest apartment house in which Professor Houlton had established his ménage while conducting his researches at the university.

The latch of the lobby door clicked as soon as I had rung the bell under the scientist's name. Carelessly I walked up a flight of stairs and knocked at the designated door. Then I fell back in surprize.

A Chinese attired in a white steward's coat had opened it.

"Mist' Mollis?" he questioned briefly. "Plofesso' Houlton wait inside."

Suspicious, and yet scoffing at my doubts—for why should the scientist not employ a Chinese house boy?—I entered. My hat and cane were in the Celestial's hands. He threw open another door. And so I walked in, like the fly to the spider.

There, his legs spread apart, and immaculate in gray tweed, stood Doctor Tsu Liang. His wounded arm was in a sling. At once my hand dived to the pistol in my coat pocket, but the gesture was halted by the feel of a revolver muzzle in my ribs. The house boy had followed me into the room.

"You are late," Doctor Tsu Liang smiled reprovingly. "Seven o'clock was the hour, according to the report of my hired investigator. Indeed it must have been, for Miss Houlton never doubted that it was you when I rang the bell shortly before the hour."

I glanced wildly around the room. There, in a corner, lay the figures of Polly and her father.

A wild cry of rage burst from me and I leaped at the Chinese arch fiend, only to have him glide eel-like out of my way.

"Careful now—careful, I say, old chap," he gibed. "They're not dead. Just asleep as you have been and as you will be again unless you excite my man and get a bullet instead of the gas."

I stood still. Tsu Liang wanted to talk. It was his failing. He wanted to gloat over me, else I would already be unconscious or dead. Perhaps I could learn something from him, forlorn hope though it was.

"Well," I said, "what do you want of them and me?"

"Ah — reasonable!" breathed Tsu Liang. "That's a virtue not often found among you Nordics in spite of your silly faith in your own cool-headedness. Too bally often you lose what poor wits you have in moments of stress. And so I will answer you.

"The professor can still be useful to me. I am forced to admit that he knows considerably more about fungi than I do. He's for utility.

"Now Miss Houlton" — his eyes watched me narrowly while his tongue licked his thin lips—"Polly—she's for pleasure."

God knows how I choked down my wrath.

"As for yourself, my dear Morris, you know more now than you did on the island, and even then it was dangerous to let you go, in view of my plans for the future. So I have once more cast you in your old rôle.—What do the Germans call it? Ah—er—a *'Versuchskanickel'*, a rabbit, a guinea-pig to try things out on."

"Interesting!" I managed the word casually, although I seethed with rage. "And how do you propose to get us back to the island?"

"How but by the means we used in coming here?" said Tsu Liang. "We flew here in an airplane from Miami, after some Indians attracted by the fire had been persuaded to take us out. We will fly straight to the island from here. I have already rented an airplane—an amphibian they call it—together with a pilot. Both can be made to disappear after they reach the island."

I heard an ambulance come clanging up the street. Tsu Liang smiled at the sound. He nodded his head approvingly. "Ah," he cried, "here it comes. Your lateness almost upset my working-schedule. This is the means of transportation for the Houltons and yourself to Long Island Sound, where our 'plane is waiting.

What could be less suspicious than an ambulance into which to load your bodies?"

Fiercely I whirled and lashed out with my left at the receding chin of the Chinese behind me. I hit him hard enough, but he must have pressed the trigger at the very same instant, for I felt a heavy blow on the left side of my chest—a blow that whirled me around and knocked me down. Dimly I saw a vision of Tsu Liang's face, a snarl twisting his lips and a poison gun in his hand. And then even this faded.

## 9

VAGUE recollections of white walls and yellow sunlight; of a man in a white coat who did painful things to me —that is all my memory retains of the period that followed.

Then came a time when I opened my eyes and looked about me. I was in a hospital room. Nowhere else could the walls be so harshly glaring; nowhere else that pungent smell of medicines.

I was alone in the room. Near me was a chair on which a magazine and a little bell were lying. Evidently my nurse had gone out for a while.

For minutes I lay there, my eyes closed against the dazzling brilliance.

"I am Greg Morris," I said to myself. "But why am I here—a crack-up?"

And then a flood of memory engulfed me. I had been shot. Tsu Liang had kidnapped Professor Houlton and Polly. Or had he? Did the shot raise any alarm?

Stiffly, and yet my feeling of fitness surprized me, I rolled over for the bell. While I still was shaking it a stern-eyed, deep-bosomed matron—not the pretty nurse of fiction—entered.

"Good," she barked. "Out of it at last. And let me tell you, young man, it was time you did snap out of it."

"Tell me—what happened?" I begged.

The Amazon needed little urging. She made some professional gestures. She felt my pulse and stuck a thermometer under my tongue.

"Take it easy," she said, "and I'll tell you all I know."

She consulted the card at the foot of my bed. "You were admitted here on May 22," she said. "It is now June 24. So you've been unconscious for over a month, and a mystery, too, what was the matter with you besides that bullet wound."

A month! I groaned. What could not have happened in a month?

"You're a lucky young man, Mr. Morris," continued the nurse. "That bullet came within the thickness of a fingernail of your heart, and clean out through your back. It was a nasty thing to patch up, but the wound is nicely healed now. Yet what bothered us was your being unconscious for so long.

"It wasn't shock, and your heart seemed to be all right, but we were fair up a tree until the doctor got curious about that dirty little gas gun you carried in your pocket. He worked out what the gas was and then got what we should do to wake you if you'd had a dose of it yourself. And that was this morning."

I recalled Doctor Tsu Liang's rage-distorted face hovering over me just before I became unconscious, and I knew that it was quite possible for him to shoot me again, even although he thought that I was dying.

"That gas idea sort of tallied with the story told by Tompkins, the intern, and Sutton, the driver of the ambulance," continued the nurse. "They said they were called to Professor Houlton's apartment and that they were met there by a Chink who shot them down. When we sent the police to get them because they didn't

come back, they were found with their uniform coats off and you were lying in a corner. By the mercy of God you hadn't bled to death, and so you were brought here in an ambulance. That's all I know."

She whipped the thermometer out of my mouth and scanned the column of mercury.

"You'll do," she said.

"But what about Professor Houlton and his daughter and Tsu Liang?" I cried from the bed.

"I don't know anything about them," said the nurse. "There was nobody else in the flat. The ambulance was discovered next day in Long Island Sound, where somebody had driven it into the water."

Tsu Liang had succeeded. The yellow man had won all the way along. Polly and her father were on the island of horror in the Everglades. I almost wept with despair, and then startled the nurse with an exclamation.

"Bring me newspapers," I cried. "Any kind of newspapers. Quick. It's important."

She looked at me without understanding and then smiled as one who is about to humor a sick child.

"Lie quiet," she called from the door, and then stiffly rustled out of sight, somehow like a starched sailing-ship.

I DID not mind what she thought or failed to think, as long as I could see the news, and grabbed the paper out of her hand as she once more came to my bedside.

There it was. Spread over the front page of the tabloid. I groaned again, for Tsu Liang had worked well during the month I was in hospital.

"FUNGOID DEATH SCOURGE SPREADS." That was the caption over the pictures, which were explained to have been taken at great personal risk by the sheet's star camera man. Inside, the story was set out in large type:

ALL FLORIDA QUAILS UNDER DEATH DEALING MUSHROOMS

Miami, Palm Beach, Fort Myers and Tampa are cities of the dead. Scourge rides air to Jacksonville.

CATERPILLAR PEST STRIKES THOUSANDS

Buildings, roads, railways, all crumble under attack of giant puffballs from heart of Everglades.

Then followed the news story. Lurid and sensationally written as it was, it could do no more than tell me what I feared; what I expected:

Death, horrible death, rides the wind in helpless Florida, and is advancing further and further north.

Twelve thousand have already died from the terrible caterpillar parasite which first attracted attention three weeks ago when cases of it followed the appearance of giant puffballs in Florida cities.

Untold other thousands will die too. They harbor within them the spores of death. They are bringing them north. New York may have the caterpillar death in it any day now.

The president has refused to put a quarantine on those leaving Florida. Every refugee, however, must be medically examined every day to make sure of his health. No cure has yet been found for the caterpillar death, and where it is undoubted, victims must be gassed before they can spread spores.

Scientists warn that the caterpillar death comes mostly to those who have their lungs irritated by giant puffball spores. Puffball spores are like mustard gas. Police orders are to keep away from ripe puffballs.

Scenes of unparalleled horror were witnessed by this paper's representative on his visit to the deserted areas of Florida.

Hundreds of unburied dead lie on the streets of Miami and Palm Beach. From behind their heads rise long mushroom stalks. Spores—the seeds of death—blow from them. But the bodies do not rot. They stay preserved. Perhaps they still are alive!

Puffballs are growing wherever there is moisture. They have blocked up water mains, and stick up through the shattered concrete of the roads. Water from the broken mains has seeped into the cellars of buildings. Puffballs have grown in the foundations, and big structures are being torn to pieces by them. They ripen within thirty-six hours. They burst in the heat of day and the wind blows their spores away.

All southern Florida is deserted now but for the government scientists studying the mushrooms. They live in rubber clothes and behind gas masks, as the writer had to do in making his visit, otherwise they too would breathe the dust of death!

There was more of it, but I had read

enough. Tsu Liang was accomplishing his fiendish work. But was he? The question struck me. He had planned to release the spores in several different cities. Yet the newspaper said that Florida only was invaded.

Quickly I glanced through the paper again. I was right. Florida alone was the center of the struggle against the fungoid cancer. This opened other possibilities. Had Tsu Liang altered his plan? Or was the outburst in Florida due to accident? Perhaps the spore clouds that blew out of the mushroom sheds when Tom Houlton set them on fire were responsible.

But then how could Tsu Liang and his men, and Polly and her father—how could they live on that island of horror with the fungi enclosing them on every side? Were they marooned, or—horror of horrors—had they themselves fallen victims to the scourge? Had they supplied the culture bodies for the caterpillar death?

My mind reeled at the thought and I seized the tabloid to look at the pictures.

There were houses whose walls were bursting asunder from the terrific power of the swelling puffballs. There were ghastly pictures of bodies lying on the streets of Miami—and the date of the paper was June 18. It was a week old!

I flung it on the floor and shouted for the nurse. I ordered her to get some of that day's papers. And when she brought them I read that the scourge was sweeping northward. Already the death toll was over a hundred thousand. The mushrooms had crossed the border into Georgia. Atlanta was being evacuated. Preparations to move all the people from New Orleans were under way. Government statements bluntly said that so far no way of stopping the advance of the puffballs and the caterpillar death had been discovered.

Tsu Liang was winning! He was winning! And Polly was in his hands!

I must still have been a little weak, for I fainted then, and later drifted off into a nightmare-filled sleep in which I was a caterpillar that crawled and squirmed, and crawled a thousand miles to get away from a nameless fear which rode behind its head.

## 10

THE nurse was shaking my shoulder. I struck out blindly and then sat up, blinking while dazzling sunlight chased the dreams out of my mind.

"There's a man to see you, Mr. Morris," cried the nurse. "Some kind of a colored man. Will you see him?"

Dazedly I looked at her. Then I remembered. What did anything matter now? But a colored man?

"Is he Chinese?"

"Lordy, no," laughed the nurse. "He's got a brown skin, but he doesn't look like a nigger. His name is Joe Big."

"Let him in," I cried. "Let him in at once."

Joe Big entered the room. He was a bewildered Indian. Yet frightened by the noise of the city, by the traffic and by the smells of the hospital, he had managed to find me. And his natural dignity slipped over him like a garment when he recognized me in the bed.

"I come," he said, "because everybody gone or dead in Fort Myers. Uncle dead. All Seminole dead. Me—I last of my nation."

"But how did you find me?" I asked in puzzlement.

"You send me paper for money," said the Indian. "On cover it say Yale Club, New York. I come to Yale Club, New York, and they tell me you in this hospital. They get me taxicab. I come here. This still New York?"

"It still is New York," I said with a

lopsided smile. Then I rolled out of the bed.

"Joe Big," I declared, "I am going back to the Everglades. Tsu Liang has caught Professor Houlton and Polly. I go to rescue them. Or perhaps avenge them."

"You kill yellow devil, too?" asked Joe Big. "Six of my nation come when they see fire on island. They come to help. They take yellow devil in canoe to Miami when he follow you. They go back to island again to help more, and yellow devil catch them when he come back and they die the same way Miss Polly dog die. Rest of my people die soon, too. Joe Big, only he alive because he see yellow devils wear wet rag, breathe through wet rag. He do same, but all others die. You kill yellow devil?"

"So help me God," I swore. "I shall kill him."

"I come with you," said Joe Big.

I felt strong again. Once more life had a purpose.

It took time to free myself from the hospital. Doctors and superintendents appeared and were horrified at the suggestion that I should get up and go on the spur of the moment. Yet they had to admit that my wound was healed. There was no good reason why I should still stay in the institution.

I can not say that I was entirely sane in what I did. Perhaps things could have been arranged more sensibly. But I was under a terrific mental strain, and the thought did not occur to me. I have nothing to be sorry for now.

My plan was made. It was suddenly in my mind when Joe Big entered my room in the hospital. The Indian acted as one chemical does on another. The scheme was crystallized on the moment of contact.

Together we two boarded a taxi and rushed downtown. One store only did I visit—one of those giant emporiums whose sales rooms hold the contents of the world on their shelves. There I got my supplies.

Four gas masks I bought—the new kind that are really meant to filter smoke out of the air and permit the wearer to talk and hear with comfort; a collapsible canoe and two hunting rifles. Other things, too.

Then on again by taxi to Roosevelt Field, where the Mallard Aircraft Company officials suddenly found a slightly crazed man and a somber Indian demanding immediate delivery of one of their famous cabin planes that seats six people and has wheels recessed in the floats so that the machine can settle on both land and water.

Twenty minutes did it take for the purchase, for fueling and all other preparations; and then Joe Big and I grimly hopped off for the south.

IT WAS early afternoon when we left, and by dark the Mallard was swooping down upon the airfield of some small town in Virginia whose name I never troubled to remember. We had burned our gasoline almost to the last gallon.

Here I found trouble and delay. Although there was a landing-field, no airplane gas was available, and Joe Big and I stayed overnight in a small hotel while an enterprising garage man undertook to bring a supply in five-gallon cans from the nearest large city.

Dawn found us on the field, but the garage man did not show up. Hours passed, and still he did not come. The sun was high in the sky when his service truck rattled up loaded with the cans and a profusely apologetic mechanic who explained that an accident had delayed him.

In my mind I cursed the man, yet I found him useful, for I entrusted to him

the sending of a telegram to an old war-time friend of mine, Dicky Sharp, at the naval base at Colon, which guards the entrance to the Panama Canal.

And then we hopped off again, and once more were winging our way southward.

Within an hour's flight Joe Big noticed the first effects of the mushroom invasion from the south. He touched my shoulder and pointed downward through the triple glass.

"People go north," he said. "Look at roads."

I brought my gaze down and marvelled at the sight. Tiny ants marched along broad tracks cut straight through fields which adjoined a highway. The ribbon of concrete itself was completely hidden from sight by a treble stream of cars which, hub to hub, and fender rubbing fender, rolled northward like an endless glistening snake. Outside the marching pedestrians was another broad lane of traffic that showed brown against the fresh green of the fields.

Cattle had cut that wide brown rut. Cattle and horse-drawn wagons loaded with the pitiful salvage of humble homes were slowly crawling northward.

I had never seen anything like it before. The world has never seen anything like it. For this was the movement of a people. This was the migration of five million souls; an ordered evacuation of the United States to an enemy who could not be fought.

In spots I saw little companies of men in olive drab toiling at the tearing-down of barriers, at the filling-in or bridging of water courses. They were the soldiers who could not be used for fighting, but could help in the evacuation, could see that the migrating millions moved with the precision of a machine.

Then we passed over the great artery of traffic and saw it no more.

It was near Jacksonville, I think, that the masses of puffballs first became apparent from the air. It had been a very damp spring, and so had provided plenty of moisture for them. We were two thousand feet up, and could see below us the fields strangely patched in brown and white. Along creek beds it seemed almost as if great snowdrifts had formed. And in other places where the mushrooms had ripened more evenly we could see a brown fog of spores drifting in the wind.

Further and further south we drove, now over inland Florida, and we swooped low over beautiful Orlando to see the desolation wrought by the puffballs among its buildings.

Great cracks zigzagged down the brick walls of school and college buildings. In them puffballs had found root, and, somehow, were finding nourishment. Perhaps we passed just at the right moment, or maybe it was the vibration of the motor that shook walls already thrust out far beyond the point of balance. But we saw no less than two whole brick façades dissolve into dust and broken rubble as I shot over them, only a hundred feet from the ground.

But it was dangerous to fly through the death-tainted air, and so we climbed again. Yet we had not yet passed over the city, when Joe Big once more touched my arm.

"Dead people there——" His brown hand pointed.

I saw a sight of horror. There were bodies laid side by side in a street, at least a hundred of them. Perhaps they had been gathered by some heroic health servants who had finally either fled or been stricken down themselves.

Men and women lay there—children, too—all horribly prone on their stomachs,

for projecting from behind the skull of each of them—the point where the cerebellum is cradled on the spine—was a slender yellow rod. It was a spike, four feet long, that ended in a club as big as my fist. And from these blew gray streamers of taint—the ripened spores of the caterpillar death.

All this my eye had taken in in a fraction of a second. And then I noticed something which made my stomach rise. Around the bodies sat a long oval of gorged and drowsy birds; large brown yellow-taloned buzzards—the scavengers of Florida.

I gave the engine all the gas I could and we shot up and away from the sight. Up and up we climbed until the needle of the altimeter showed 10,000 feet. The Mallard, I had been told, had a ceiling of 15,000 feet, and I continued climbing slowly to that height, for I had a use for it.

Florida was a broad belt of green mottled with white below us. The white was sand—and also puffballs. On either side I could see water; the Atlantic to my left and the Mexican gulf far to my right.

Distantly the tall towers of West Palm Beach came into sight, and beyond them the buildings of Miami. I held to my course, for I knew that the island of horror was almost in the center of the Everglades, and almost due west of Miami.

Joe Big was staring excitedly onto the relief map of the Everglades, as it unrolled below us. Now and again he called out the Seminole name for some familiar piece of prairie or lagoon, and then he cried: "Ten mile more now—see—there is the island."

I looked ahead and nodded. Some one had left uncovered one of the big mirrors on Professor Houlton's moon-ray apparatus. The reflector was a miniature sun. Again I gave the motor the gun and swooped up as far as I could. I circled so that the 'plane was in the setting sun to the eye of any chance observer on the island, and then cut off the spark.

Slowly, slowly the Mallard settled while it glided ever nearer to our objective. I could distinguish the tall cypress trees on one side of the island, the blackened wreckage of the mushroom sheds on the sand beyond, while the silent 'plane swooped downward.

Half a mile from the island, and screened from it by a clump of trees on firm ground, I saw a three hundred yard long lagoon. It was made to order for me. I swung the 'plane very slightly and we splashed lightly onto the water.

## 11

All my attention had been concentrated on the landing, but now I glanced outside the cabin window and marvelled at the strangeness of the landscape.

Immediately before us was a little island behind whose trees the Mallard was sheltered from sight. Now I saw that there were many dead trees on the islet, and many sagging until their bare branches swept the sand. For they bore huge and cumbersome fruit.

Gigantic puffballs had gained footing in a place of decay on the stems and were weighting them down. The actual puffball, I remembered, was but the fruit of the mushroom. I knew that the interior of the trees must be a mass of mycelium.

Many of the puffballs too were ripe. We saw one of them, but fifty yards away, explode with a report like that of somebody clapping his hands. The outer casing split like inch-thick chamoic leather and brown smoke gushed out and spread. I thought of the underwater ink-screen of the cuttlefish. Brown, smoking fuzz, like loosely woven felt, was exposed in the

gaping puffball when the wind had moved the first gush of spores.

Joe Big winced at the sight, and then he and I started to strip off our clothes while still within the almost air-tight cabin.

Every stitch did we take off, and then we plastered our bodies liberally with vaseline, as if we were long-distance swimmers.

But I was taking no chances with the fungi, and I meant to close even the pores of our skins lest one of the caterpillar death spores should lodge in a trifling scratch or a mosquito bite.

Then we clothed ourselves again, slipped the gas masks over our heads and opened the cabin door. It took time to assemble the canvas boat, and the brief dusk was already setting in when we started off to the island of horror.

Strange and grotesque we must have looked in our snouted headgear, and strange and grotesque was the country we traversed. Once during the trip Joe Big lifted his hand as a signal. An alligator at least fifteen feet long was swimming ahead of us in the channel we were following. We waited until the beast had branched off, for our canvas canoe was not strong enough to risk contact with the creature's thrashing tail.

Another time both Joe Big and I crouched low in the bottom of the boat and paddled with our hands because there was no room to wield the paddles. Overhanging our route were half a dozen brown and bulbous mushrooms which might explode at a touch. And we were not anxious to put our gas masks to extreme test at once.

Dimly, through the trees, I saw a light shining. It was from the house on the island. I pointed it out to Joe Big, but the Indian did not even stop paddling. Probably he had seen it long minutes before I did. Then sand grated under the canvas bottom. We had arrived. We were on the side of the island nearest the house, but some distance from the landing-stage.

Cautiously we disembarked and took out our rifles. Joe Big's muffled voice was near my ear. "Stay here," he said. "I go see that road clear." He faded away like a dark ghost among the bearded cypresses.

I waited. Time dragged. Then I jumped to my feet. There had been a rifle shot and a gurgling scream of horror that broke off sharply at its peak. For several seconds there was a silence as heavy as the darkness under the trees, and then a faint splashing.

I was peering blindly into the dark behind me, thinking that Joe Big must have fallen prey to an alligator, when I felt his hand on my arm.

"Bad luck," he said. "Yellow man keep watch. He see me and shoot. I kill him with knife. Come to house quick."

Silently we stole toward the light. And then I crashed against a tree. The light had gone out. We heard a gabble of voices on the twisting path to the landing-stage, and ducked behind the shelter of a bush. A bobbing lantern appeared. Four men, clad in gas masks and tightly fitting suits of gayly flowered oilcloth ran past us. Each man had a rifle.

"Up to the house," I cried, and jumped into the path.

Swiftly we stole up the track and then the black shadow of the house loomed before us. Joe Big pulled me to one side.

"Me—I lead," he grunted. "We go through window in my old room."

We crouched behind other bushes, for a man carrying an electric torch had stepped out of the patio, and was coming down toward us and the landing-stage, his torch swinging wide arcs of light as he moved.

Silently we crawled through another screen of bushes, and then Joe Big lifted his rifle to his shoulder.

"Yellow devil!" he snarled.

I knocked up the barrel before he could fire.

"First we must find Polly and her father," I cautioned.

Then, while I still clutched the Indian's sleeve, I did a bit of rapid calculation. Tsu Liang had been master of ten servants when I was last on the island. But I had killed his big house boy, and Tom Houlton another. Now Joe Big had killed one, and four had left the house, as well as Tsu Liang. There could be no more than three Chinese in the place. I explained this to Joe Big, and we turned into the patio to try the living-room door.

But as I fumbled for the latch I found nothing but smooth steel. The door had been changed. I felt all over it, and found not a single projecting point. Somehow in my over-anxiety I must have grown careless, for my rifle butt knocked against the portal.

At once a sharp voice challenged in Chinese from the other side. There was a doorkeeper. Probably he alone could open the door. Again the voice asked a question. We could not get in. But no, there was a chance—a slim one.

"Don't be silly," I drawled in affected tones as near those of Tsu Liang as I could make them. "The idiot was frightened by a bally alligator."

THE trick worked. I heard the click of tumblers, and the drawing of bolts. A door squeaked open, but it was not the one I touched. It was another beyond it. Then again the sounds were repeated. A crack of light now gleamed by the jamb.

Practically in one motion I put the flat of my foot against the slowly opening door, thrust hard and plunged forward with the butt of my rifle. Something soft that groaned stopped it.

Joe Big and I were inside the house. At our feet lay a middle-aged Chinese whose hands were clasped to his stomach while he writhed in agony. There was no one else in the big room.

"Quick," I cried to Joe Big. "Tie him up and gag him. I'll bar the doors. This place is a fortress."

My glance around the room had shown me great changes. Not only was there a double door of heavy teak and steel through which we had passed, but the windows, too, were similarly shuttered. Red rubber showed around the edges, and evidently the fastenings were air-tight.

I locked and barred both doors and then turned to Joe Big. The Indian was staring at a still figure on the floor. A knife in his hand dripped blood.

"Better they all die," he muttered in answer to my exclamation, and stooped to wipe the blade on the dead man's shirt.

Joe Big was right. I suppressed my squeamishness. The nest of world-poisoners must be wiped out.

The Indian had taken off his shoes and was disappearing soundlessly down a passage. I followed him as quietly as I could and saw him stooping in front of a door. Sounds of frying came from the other side. It was the kitchen door.

I saw the Indian's hand on the knob. Slowly the door opened, and then a squeal like that of an enraged pig sounded in the passage.

The red man flung the door wide open and jumped into the room. I heard a high gibber of Cantonese, and a meat cleaver hissed by my head and struck the door opposite. Somebody yelled in the room and the door burst open. A Chinese

holding a gas pistol in one hand and a knife in the other bounded out at me.

My rifle barked from waist level and I saw him collapse like a punctured balloon, even while he was in midair. Blood spattered the eye-glasses of my mask as he struck me. But it was Chinese blood. The man was already dead.

"Joe Big," I yelled, and the Indian was at my side. Again he was wiping his knife, this time on a cook's white apron.

We had won the house. But the shot must have alarmed Tsu Liang and his party. We must make sure that they could not get in.

Joe Big's gas helmet was torn on one side. Blood was staining the ripped edges.

"Cook hit me," he said stolidly in answer to my question. "Cut my ear off." He did not even trouble to take off the gas mask.

We heard a door being pounded and shaken. Was it Tsu Liang already returned? No, I heard a voice. It was Polly's voice.

"Help! Help!" it cried.

"Coming!" I shouted, and raced down the passage. I found the door locked, and hurled myself against it. Woodwork splintered and snapped. And then I had Polly Houlton in my arms.

Viciously she kicked at my shins and beat my shoulders.

At first I did not understand it, and then I laughed. It was the gas helmet. I tore off the useless thing, and Polly staggered. She almost fainted, and I had to support her.

"Is it really you, Greg?" she whispered. "Tsu Liang said you had been killed."

"Too tough to kill," I boasted happily, and then cried out, "But aren't you glad to see me?"

For Polly Houlton was crying. "Y-yes, Greg," she sobbed. "I'm crying for happiness."

Women are strange creatures. Other men have said that before.

Professor Houlton was standing by a window whose metal shutters were ajar.

"I'm glad to see you, boy," he said wanly. "But I heard some men go past my window just now. Look to the back door."

I loosed my hold on Polly.

"Show me the way," I said, and she dashed before me, continuing down the passage and turning an angle.

A double door under an electric light was slowly opening. Evidently the bolts could be manipulated from the outside. I swept the girl behind the corner and knelt down in the passage with my rifle to my shoulder.

A sheen of gun metal appeared in the crack. It was a rifle barrel gradually being thrust in. Next came an oilcloth-covered arm and then a head wearing a gas mask.

Calmly I fired and saw a black spot appear where the intruder's forehead would be. The man slumped down like a sack of flour between the double door and the frame. Somebody started to pull him back by the legs, only to be stopped by a harsh order in Cantonese.

There was silence for a full minute, and I had an intuition of what might happen.

"Run," I whispered to Polly. "Fetch my gas mask."

Tsu Liang's voice rose vibrant with anger. "I say there," he called. "Who is shooting at us?"

I made no reply and heard him swearing to himself.

"Professor Houlton," he said savagely, "if it's you that's behind the door, I tell you now that I shall kill you, and give that brat of yours to my men, if you don't

let me in at once. I will use dynamite to blow in the doors and let the spores in. There are enough of them coming through this part-open door now."

Still I made no reply, and Polly Houlton returned with the gas mask which I slipped on.

"Look in the living-room, dear," I whispered. "You'll find two more masks that I brought for you and your father, and try to find another one somewhere in the house for Joe Big. His is spoiled. Where is he, anyway?"

"He's watching by the front door," said Polly, and once more ran away.

I SPRAWLED on the floor of the corridor. My rifle sights were on a black speck that had appeared low over the body of the dead Chinese. The speck turned into the barrel of a pistol and a hand became visible behind it.

Fire streamed from the pistol and gelatine gas bullets blotched the wall waist-high behind me with poison gas. Deliberately I squeezed the trigger, and the hand twitched away as I heard a yell of pain from Tsu Liang. I grinned my satisfaction as I charged noiselessly at the door, snatched in the body on the threshold and slammed the steel portal to.

There was a bar which could be lowered, and I breathed my thankfulness when I had wrenched it down.

Tsu Liang was a madman. I could hear him raving outside. He was shouting orders in English to his men to get dynamite.

The gas mask I wore was not designed to filter out the poison vapor of Tsu Liang's pistol. Yet none of the fragile bullets had hit me, and I was twenty feet from the walls where the liquid had splashed. For a few moments while I leaned against the door I felt weak and dizzy, but I soon found myself alert once more.

Professor Houlton and Polly, both wearing masks, joined me. Joe Big was still watching the front door, they told me.

With my ear pressed against the steel barrier before me I could faintly distinguish furtive movements on the other side. They worried me. Yet I could not open the door and shoot without making so much noise that I would warn the Chinese. I would only expose myself to their fire.

Outside there rose a frenzied call.

"Pro-o-ofessor Houlton!"

The tall man beside me spoke.

"Yes."

"Professor," Tsu Liang's voice chattered. "My wrist is smashed and bleeding. You must have some mercy in you. Surely you can't keep me outside here, exposed to the spores, in my condition."

Houlton laughed shortly.

"What mercy have you shown to the thousands that are dead?" he demanded.

"But to a brother scientist," Tsu Liang pleaded.

"Scoundrel," roared Professor Houlton, "you are no scientist. You have picked my brains to bring ruin upon my country. Besides," he added, "it is a mathematical certainty that some of the Cordyceps spores have already found lodgment in your wound."

Silence followed, and then three shots. They sounded like a signal to me and I cried, "Back—back behind the corner of the passage."

We ran back, and no sooner had we done so than we were knocked off our feet by a terrific blast of air. Fragments of the steel door buried themselves in the wall near us. It had been blown in. And not only the back door, for another explosion followed an instant later. I could

hear Joe Big shouting a strange ululating chant as his rifle fired shot after shot.

There was another noise too, a noise as of rushing wind—a rising drone that grew to the familiar roar of airplane engines—many engines.

I jumped around the corner, my rifle flaming lead at two startled Chinese who craned their masked heads skyward instead of attacking through the shattered masonry that had held the door.

One of them clutched his chest and fell. The other screamed and ran away. I followed to the smoking pit by the broken stone and caught him with another shot; for the night had become brighter than day. Half a dozen blinding flares drifted slowly to earth on tiny parachutes.

"What—what is it?" faltered Professor Houlton.

"Help," I said briefly and ran out into the light.

Tsu Liang was not to be seen on my side of the house. Nor was any other live Chinese. I walked around to the other side. Nobody was in sight there either. Cautiously I approached the patio and peered in. It was empty.

"Joe Big," I called. "Joe Big!"

Polly Houlton came out of the black shadows, picking her way daintily through the rubble that strewed the tiles.

"He is not in the front room," she said. "There is some blood where he was lying, but Joe is gone. There is a dead Chinese by the door, too."

"Is it Doctor Tsu Liang?" I cried.

"No, just one of his men."

## 12

ONE ship was still circling over the brightly illuminated island. The others had gone over, and I could see their landing-lights switched on as they settled on the water.

"Tell me, Greg," asked Polly, "what are all these airships?"

I laughed happily and put my arm around her shoulder. Gas masks are a nuisance, I then decided.

"They're naval boats from Colon where the base is to guard the Panama Canal," I said. "I wired to Dicky Sharp, a war-time friend of mine at the naval air establishment, and told him what was going on here. I said that I was coming down to rescue you and wipe the place clean. He came and brought some friends with him—it's only six hours' flight away—and thank God that he did come."

One of the seaplanes was taxying forward in the more or less open water by the landing-stage. It advanced slowly until its floats touched sand. I saw a man climb out of the cockpit and splash into knee-deep water.

With my hands raised in the air, I ran to meet him.

"Dicky Sharp," I cried, "is that you?" For like myself he was wearing a gas mask that concealed his face.

"Greg Morris!" he exclaimed and advanced with outstretched hand.

A rifle cracked from some bushes on the left and I felt a blow on my foot. The leather heel of the left shoe had been neatly torn off. A yell of fear and a deep shout of triumph followed the shot, and the bushes waved agitatedly. Out of them burst Tsu Liang. He wheeled and threw his rifle at Joe Big, who followed him laboriously through the tangle, and then the Chinese raced toward us, his free hand gripping his shattered wrist.

"Help," he cried. "I surrender, prisoner of war——"

But Joe Big was faster than he. In gigantic bounds the Indian overhauled the Chinese. Brown fingers stretched out,

caught the yellow man's gas mask and tore it off his head.

Dicky Sharp had brought out a pistol and was training it on Joe Big.

"Don't do it," I snapped. "Shoot the other one if you must. He is the man who spread the caterpillar death."

The Chinese dodged toward us through the long grass and around a dead tree on which a huge brown puffball hung. I heard him scream again and trip over something. His elbow struck the puffball and it exploded into brown dust which veiled to us what was happening.

Joe Big, too, stopped at the edge of the cloud and peered intently into it. From its center there came a horrible choking sound and then another ghastly scream. There were sounds as of a struggle; of vicious jaws snapping again and again. And then there was silence. Something long and low and slimy scuttered out of the cloud toward the water. It hissed like a land torpedo through the tall grass and splashed when it reached water. Then it was gone.

"My God!" gasped Dicky Sharp. "It's the grandfather of all alligators. It's twenty feet long!"

Slowly the brown fog lifted. The aviator in the 'plane that roared above us dropped more flares and we saw that the place where we had last seen Tsu Liang was bare. There was the puffball still smoking its brown spores. But nowhere was there a trace of the Chinese scientist.

Joe Big was standing, his head in its new gas mask, sunk upon his chest. Suddenly he swept up an arm and tore the protecting envelope from his head.

"Joe!" I gasped. "Are you crazy? Put that on again quick."

"I die," said the Indian. "Spirit of my people kill yellow devil. I die now."

Slowly he began to intone the ululating chant I had heard before, and then a horribly gurgling cough gagged him. Blood gushed from Joe Big's mouth and nose, and though I caught him before he fell, I sensed that he was dead. A bullet-hole in his chest showed why.

SILENTLY I folded his arms and wiped the blood off his mouth. I could not speak—not even to Dicky Sharp or to Polly Houlton, who stood beside him now. Presently we were joined by the professor, and Dicky started to flash a message with his electric torch to one of the seaplanes.

Collapsible boats brought more flyers to the shore of the ghastly island, and Dicky Sharp clicked to attention as a stocky man came up, whose leather coat and gas mask concealed all signs of rank.

"Commander Bob Bradley," he introduced him. "He is in charge of the squadron."

"And so this is where the terrible pest was manufactured," said the stocky officer heavily. "You know that it threatens to lay waste the whole of the North American continent? No saying even then where it will stop. It may cover the world."

Professor Houlton snorted in his gas mask.

"Nonsense," he said belligerently. "Smash those mirrors on that framework there so that the lunar rays are no longer concentrated on the original culture beds and I'll guarantee that with the exception of the few odd ones there will not be a single accelerated puffball or Cordyceps in the land within a month."

"What!" The exclamation burst from several lips.

"Certainly," said the professor warmly. "I tried to do it myself immediately after I was captured, but that Chinese fiend caught me at it and had me whipped until I could not stand. Me—Professor

Howard Houlton. And ever since, my daughter and I have been under guard while she nursed me back to health."

"But how is that, Professor?" I cried. "What effect do these rays have now?"

"I don't know how familiar you are with my subject," said the professor kindly. "But I know by experiment that the rays and the chemicals with which the breeding-beds are impregnated give an accelerated development to the fungi bred there for about ten generations in the case of puffballs. I have not experimented with the Cordyceps, but since they have not been cultured long I should say that there would be only five or six generations of acceleration and virulence strong enough to give them power to attack mammals.

"Now you may say that an accelerated puffball grows, ripens and sends out its spores in the maximum space of forty-eight hours. The spores may float for seconds or for hours according to atmospheric conditions. Let us put the maximum at twenty-four hours. In that time they may travel a foot or many miles, depending on the wind. The maximum would be about fifty miles.

"Thus you see the longest generation would be three days and the maximum rate of travel fifty miles.

"In thirty days the furthest puffball spores will be five hundred miles from this point in the Everglades, and then they lose their acceleration and become the spores of ordinary puffballs."

"But Tsu Liang planned to lay waste the whole of the United States with these spores," I ventured to suggest.

"Quite so," agreed the professor. "He could have done so if he'd been a man of courage. He could have collected newly accelerated spores from the original culture beds, spores of the puffballs and also of the Cordyceps from the bodies of the poor Indians whom he has lying there.

"He could have released them in New York, in Detroit, in Chicago, along the Pacific Coast, and he could have wiped out the United States; for they would have had an active radius of four hundred and fifty miles from each point of release.

"But he was a craven. I heard him gloat and boast about his cleverness in imprisoning the poor Indians who had come here to help him when they saw the place was on fire more than a month ago. He thought that he was clever because he inoculated them with the spores of the Cordyceps—the caterpillar death fungus.

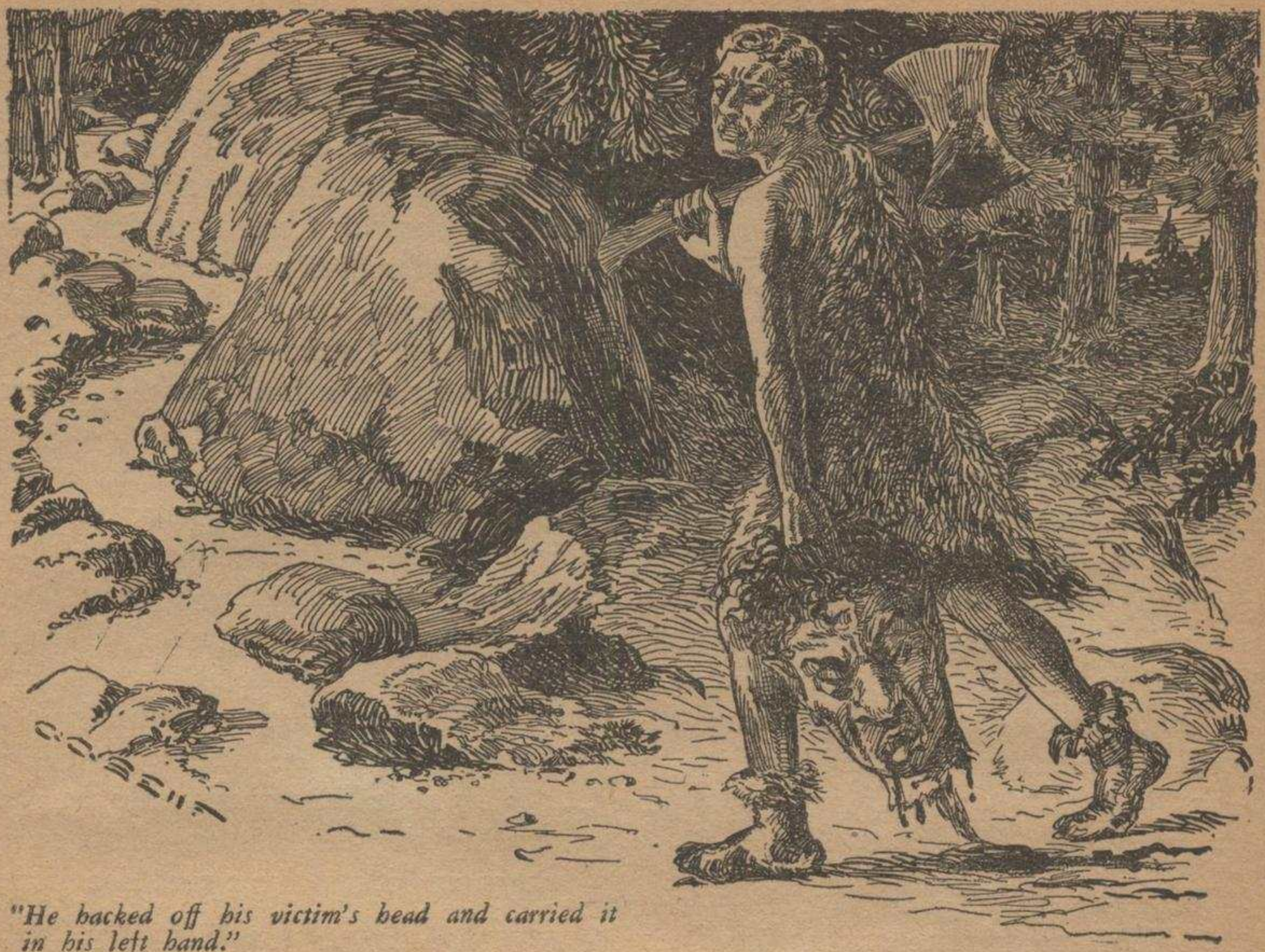
"But he burned his own bridges behind him, for when he wanted to leave the Everglades to spread his poison, he discovered that he could not find his way out, and he had killed the only men who could guide him. He was imprisoned himself and he was afraid to leave because he feared that he would be lost in the swamp."

Commander Bradley gave a brisk order, and a group of men advanced upon Professor Houlton's lunar ray projector.

As for me—Polly and I went away from there, into the old house where we were out of sight of our rescuers.

And here again I cursed all gas masks and the necessity for wearing them.





*"He backed off his victim's head and carried it in his left hand."*

# The Children of the Night

## *By* ROBERT E. HOWARD

*A tale of atavism, and a race of sub-men who lived in England before the coming of the Picts*

THERE were, I remember, six of us in Conrad's bizarrely fashioned study, with its queer relics from all over the world and its long rows of books which ranged from the Mandrake Press edition of Boccaccio to a *Missale Romanum,* bound in clasped oak boards and printed in Venice, 1740. Clemants and Professor Kirowan had just engaged in a somewhat testy anthropological argument: Clemants upholding the theory of a separate, distinct Alpine race, while the professor maintained that this so-called race was merely a deviation from an original Aryan stock—possibly the result of an admixture between the southern or Mediterranean races and the Nordic people.

"And how," asked Clemants, "do you account for their brachycephalicism? The Mediterraneans were as long-headed as the Aryans: would admixture between these dolichocephalic peoples produce a broad-headed intermediate type?"

"Special conditions might bring about a change in an originally long-headed race," snapped Kirowan. "Boaz has demonstrated, for instance, that in the case of immigrants to America, skull formations often change in one genera-

tion. And Flinders Petrie has shown that the Lombards changed from a long-headed to a round-headed race in a few centuries."

"But what caused these changes?"

"Much is yet unknown to science," answered Kirowan, "and we need not be dogmatic. No one knows, as yet, why people of British and Irish ancestry tend to grow unusually tall in the Darling district of Australia—Cornstalks, as they are called—or why people of such descent generally have thinner jaw-structures after a few generations in New England. The universe is full of the unexplainable."

"And therefore the uninteresting, according to Machen," laughed Taverel.

Conrad shook his head. "I must disagree. To me the unknowable is most tantalizingly fascinating.

"Which accounts, no doubt, for all the works on witchcraft and demonology I see on your shelves," said Ketrick, with a wave of his hand toward the rows of books.

And let me speak of Ketrick. Each of the six of us was of the same breed—that is to say, a Briton or an American of British descent. By British, I include all natural inhabitants of the British Isles. We represented various strains of English and Celtic blood, but basically, these strains are the same after all. But Ketrick: to me the man always seemed strangely alien. It was in his eyes that this difference showed externally. They were a sort of amber, almost yellow, and slightly oblique. At times, when one looked at his face from certain angles, they seemed to slant like a Chinaman's.

Others than I had noticed this feature, so unusual in a man of pure Anglo-Saxon descent. The usual myths ascribing his slanted eyes to some pre-natal influence had been mooted about, and I remember Professor Hendrik Brooler once remarked that Ketrick was undoubtedly an atavism, representing a reversion of type to some dim and distant ancestor of Mongolian blood—a sort of freak reversion, since none of his family showed such traces.

But Ketrick comes of the Welsh branch of the Cetrics of Sussex, and his lineage is set down in the *Book of Peers*. There you may read the line of his ancestry, which extends unbroken to the days of Canute. No slightest trace of Mongoloid intermixture appears in the genealogy, and how could there have been such intermixture in old Saxon England? For Ketrick is the modern form of Cedric, and though that branch fled into Wales before the invasion of the Danes, its male heirs consistently married with English families on the border marches, and it remains a pure line of the powerful Sussex Cetrics—almost pure Saxon. As for the man himself, this defect of his eyes, if it can be called a defect, is his only abnormality, except for a slight and occasional lisping of speech. He is highly intellectual and a good companion except for a slight aloofness and a rather callous indifference which may serve to mask an extremely sensitive nature.

Referring to his remark, I said with a laugh: "Conrad pursues the obscure and mystic as some men pursue romance; his shelves throng with delightful nightmares of every variety."

Our host nodded. "You'll find there a number of delectable dishes—Machen, Poe, Blackwood, Maturin—look, there's a rare feast—*Horrid Mysteries*, by the Marquis of Grosse—the real Eighteenth Century edition."

Taverel scanned the shelves. "Weird fiction seems to vie with works on witchcraft, voodoo and dark magic."

"True; historians and chroniclers are often dull; tale-weavers never—the mas-

ters, I mean. A voodoo sacrifice can be described in such a dull manner as to take all the real fantasy out of it, and leave it merely a sordid murder. I will admit that few writers of fiction touch the true heights of horror—most of their stuff is too concrete, given too much earthly shape and dimensions. But in such tales as Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher,* Machen's *Black Seal* and Lovecraft's *Call of Cthulhu*—the three master horror-tales, to my mind—the reader is borne into dark and *outer* realms of imagination.

"But look there," he continued, "there, sandwiched between that nightmare of Huysmans', and Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*—Von Junzt's *Nameless Cults.* There's a book to keep you awake at night!"

"I've read it," said Taverel, "and I'm convinced the man is mad. His work is like the conversation of a maniac—it runs with startling clarity for awhile, then suddenly merges into vagueness and disconnected ramblings."

Conrad shook his head. "Have you ever thought that perhaps it is his very sanity that causes him to write in that fashion? What if he dares not put on paper all he knows? What if his vague suppositions are dark and mysterious hints, keys to the puzzle, to those who know?"

"Bosh!" This from Kirowan. "Are you intimating that any of the nightmare cults referred to by Von Junzt survive to this day—if they ever existed save in the hag-ridden brain of a lunatic poet and philosopher?"

"Not he alone used hidden meanings," answered Conrad. "If you will scan various works of certain great poets you may find double meanings. Men have stumbled on to cosmic secrets in the past and given a hint of them to the world in cryptic words. Do you remember Von Junzt's hints of 'a city in the waste'? What do you think of Flecker's lines:

> " 'Pass not beneath! Men say there blows in stony deserts still a rose
> " 'But with no scarlet to her leaf—and from whose heart no perfume flows.'

"Men may stumble upon secret things, but Von Junzt dipped deep into forbidden mysteries. He was one of the few men, for instance, who could read the *Necronomicon* in the original Greek translation."

Taverel shrugged his shoulders, and Professor Kirowan, though he snorted and puffed viciously at his pipe, made no direct reply; for he, as well as Conrad, had delved into the Latin version of the book, and had found there things not even a cold-blooded scientist could answer or refute.

"Well," he said presently, "suppose we admit the former existence of cults revolving about such nameless and ghastly gods and entities as Cthulhu, Yog Sothoth, Tsathoggua, Gol-goroth, and the like, I can not find it in my mind to believe that survivals of such cults lurk in the dark corners of the world today."

To our surprize Clemants answered. He was a tall, lean man, silent almost to the point of taciturnity, and his fierce struggles with poverty in his youth had lined his face beyond his years. Like many another artist, he lived a distinctly dual literary life, his swashbuckling novels furnishing him a generous income, and his editorial position on *The Cloven Hoof* affording him full artistic expression. *The Cloven Hoof* was a poetry magazine whose bizarre contents had often aroused the shocked interest of the conservative critics.

"You remember Von Junzt makes mention of a so-called Bran cult," said Clemants, stuffing his pipe-bowl with a peculiarly villainous brand of shag tobacco. "I

think I heard you and Taverel discussing it once."

"As I gather from his hints," snapped Kirowan, "Von Junzt includes this particular cult among those still in existence. Absurd."

Again Clemants shook his head. "When I was a boy working my way through a certain university, I had for roommate a lad as poor and ambitious as I. If I told you his name, it would startle you. Though he came of an old Scotch line of Galloway, he was obviously of a non-Aryan type.

"This is in strictest confidence, you understand. But my roommate talked in his sleep. I began to listen and put his disjointed mumbling together. And in his mutterings I first heard of the ancient cult hinted at by Van Junzt; of the king who ruled the Dark Empire, which was a revival of an older, darker empire dating back into the Stone Age; and of the great, nameless cavern where stands the Dark Man—the image of Bran Mak Morn, carved in his likeness by a masterhand while the great king yet lived, and to which each worshipper of Bran makes a pilgrimage once in his or her lifetime. Yes, that cult lives today in the descendants of Bran's people—a silent, unknown current it flows on in the great ocean of life, waiting for the stone image of the great Bran to breathe and move with sudden life, and come from the great cavern to rebuild their lost empire."

"And who were the people of that empire?" asked Ketrick.

"Picts," answered Taverel, "doubtless the people known later as the wild Picts of Galloway were predominantly Celtic—a mixture of Gaelic, Cymric, aboriginal and possibly Teutonic elements. Whether they took their name from the older race or lent their own name to that race, is a matter yet to be decided. But when Von Junzt speaks of Picts, he refers specifically to the small, dark, garlic-eating peoples of Mediterranean blood who brought the Neolithic culture into Britain. The first settlers of that country, in fact, who gave rise to the tales of earth spirits and goblins."

"I can not agree to that last statement," said Conrad. "These legends ascribe a deformity and inhumanness of appearances to the characters. There was nothing about the Picts to excite such horror and repulsion in the Aryan peoples. I believe that the Mediterraneans were preceded by a Mongoloid type, very low in the scale of development, whence these tales——"

"Quite true," broke in Kirowan, "but I hardly think they preceded the Picts, as you call them, into Britain. We find troll and dwarf legends all over the Continent, and I am inclined to think that both the Mediterranean and Aryan peoples brought these tales with them from the Continent. They must have been of extremely inhuman aspect, those early Mongoloids."

"At least," said Conrad, "here is a flint mallet a miner found in the Welsh hills and gave to me, which has never been fully explained. It is obviously of no ordinary Neolithic make. See how small it is, compared to most implements of that age; almost like a child's toy; yet it is surprizingly heavy and no doubt a deadly blow could be dealt with it. I fitted the handle to it, myself, and you would be surprized to know how difficult it was to carve it into a shape and balance corresponding with the head."

We looked at the thing. It was well made, polished somewhat like the other remnants of the Neolithic I had seen, yet as Conrad said, it was strangely different. Its small size was oddly disquieting, for it had no appearance of a toy, otherwise.

It was as sinister in suggestion as an Aztec sacrificial dagger. Conrad had fashioned the oaken handle with rare skill, and in carving it to fit the head, had managed to give it the same unnatural appearance as the mallet itself had. He had even copied the workmanship of primal times, fixing the head into the cleft of the haft with rawhide.

"My word!" Taverel made a clumsy pass at an imaginary antagonist and nearly shattered a costly Shang vase. "The balance of the thing is all off center; I'd have to readjust all my mechanics of poise and equilibrium to handle it."

"Let me see it," Ketrick took the thing and fumbled with it, trying to strike the secret of its proper handling. At length, somewhat irritated, he swung it up and struck a heavy blow at a shield which hung on the wall near by. I was standing near it; I saw the hellish mallet twist in his hand like a live serpent, and his arm wrenched out of line; I heard a shout of alarmed warning—then darkness came with the impact of the mallet against my head.

* * * * * * *

SLOWLY I drifted back to consciousness. First there was dull sensation with blindness and total lack of knowledge as to where I was or what I was; then vague realization of life and being, and a hard something pressing into my ribs. Then the mists cleared and I came to myself completely.

I lay on my back half beneath some underbrush and my head throbbed fiercely. Also my hair was caked and clotted with blood, for the scalp had been laid open. But my eyes traveled down my body and limbs, naked but for a deerskin loin-cloth and sandals of the same material, and found no other wound. That which pressed so uncomfortably into my ribs was my ax, on which I had fallen.

Now an abhorrent babble reached my ears and stung me into clear consciousness. The noise was faintly like language, but not such language as men are accustomed to. It sounded much like the repeated hissing of many great snakes.

I stared. I lay in a great, gloomy forest. The glade was overshadowed, so that even in the daytime it was very dark. Aye—that forest was dark, cold, silent, gigantic and utterly grisly. And I looked into the glade.

I saw a shambles. Five men lay there—at least, what had been five men. Now as I marked the abhorrent mutilations my soul sickened. And about them clustered the—Things. Humans they were, of a sort, though I did not consider them so. They were short and stocky, with broad heads too large for their scrawny bodies. Their hair was snaky and stringy, their faces broad and square, with flat noses, hideously slanted eyes, a thin gash for a mouth, and pointed ears. They wore the skins of beasts, as did I, but these hides were but crudely dressed. They bore small bows and flint-tipped arrows, flint knives and cudgels. And they conversed in a speech as hideous as themselves, a hissing, reptilian speech that filled me with dread and loathing.

Oh, I hated them as I lay there; my brain flamed with white-hot fury. And now I remembered. We had hunted, we six youths of the Sword People, and had wandered far into that grim forest which our people generally shunned. Weary of the chase, we had paused to rest; to me had been given the first watch, for in those days, no sleep was safe without a sentry. Now shame and revulsion shook my whole being. I had slept—I had betrayed my comrades. And now they lay gashed and mangled—butchered while they slept, by vermin who had never dared to stand before them on equal

terms. I, Aryara, had betrayed my trust.

Aye—I remembered. I had slept and in the midst of a dream of the hunt, fire and sparks had exploded in my head and I had plunged into a deeper darkness where there were no dreams. And now the penalty. They who had stolen through the dense forest and smitten me senseless, had not paused to mutilate me. Thinking me dead they had hastened swiftly to their grisly work. Now perhaps they had forgotten me for a time. I had sat somewhat apart from the others, and when struck, had fallen half under some bushes. But soon they would remember me. I would hunt no more, dance no more in the dances of hunt and love and war, see no more the wattle huts of the Sword People.

But I had no wish to escape back to my people. Should I slink back with my tale of infamy and disgrace? Should I hear the words of scorn my tribe would fling at me, see the girls point their contemptuous fingers at the youth who slept and betrayed his comrades to the knives of vermin?

Tears stung my eyes, and slow hate heaved up in my bosom, and my brain. I would never bear the sword that marked the warrior. I would never triumph over worthy foes and die gloriously beneath the arrows of the Picts or the axes of the Wolf People or the River People. I would go down to death beneath a nauseous rabble, whom the Picts had long ago driven into forest dens like rats.

And mâd rage gripped me and dried my tears, giving in their stead a berserk blaze of wrath. If such reptiles were to bring about my downfall, I would make it a fall long remembered—if such beasts had memories.

Moving cautiously, I shifted until my hand was on the haft of my ax; then I called on Il-marinen and bounded up as a tiger springs. And as a tiger springs I was among my enemies and smashed a flat skull as a man crushes the head of a snake. A sudden wild clamor of fear broke from my victims and for an instant they closed round me, hacking and stabbing. A knife gashed my chest but I gave no heed. A red mist waved before my eyes, and my body and limbs moved in perfect accord with my fighting brain. Snarling, hacking and smiting, I was a tiger among reptiles. In an instant they gave way and fled, leaving me bestriding half a dozen stunted bodies. But I was not satiated.

I was close on the heels of the tallest one, whose head would perhaps come to my shoulder, and who seemed to be their chief. He fled down a sort of runway, squealing like a monstrous lizard, and when I was close at his shoulder, he dived, snake-like, into the bushes. But I was too swift for him, and I dragged him forth and butchered him in a most gory fashion.

And through the bushes I saw the trail he was striving to reach—a path winding in and out among the trees, almost too narrow to allow the traversing of it by a man of normal size. I hacked off my victim's hideous head, and carrying it in my left hand, went up the serpent-path, with my red ax in my right.

Now as I strode swiftly along the path and blood splashed beside my feet at every step from the severed jugular of my foe, I thought of those I hunted. Aye—we held them in so little esteem, we hunted by day in the forest they haunted. What they called themselves, we never knew; for none of our tribe ever learned the accursed hissing sibilances they used as speech; but we called them the Children of the Night. And night-things they were indeed, for they slunk in the depths

of the dark forests, and in subterraneous dwellings, venturing forth into the hills only when their conquerors slept. It was at night that they did their foul deeds—the quick flight of a flint-tipped arrow to slay cattle, or perhaps a loitering human, the snatching of a child that had wandered from the village.

But it was for more than this we gave them their name; they were, in truth, people of night and darkness and the ancient horror-ridden shadows of bygone ages. For these creatures were very old, and they represented an outworn age. They had once overrun and possessed this land, and they had been driven into hiding and obscurity by the dark, fierce little Picts with whom we contested now, and who hated and loathed them as savagely as did we.

The Picts were different from us in general appearance, being shorter of stature and dark of hair, eyes and skin, whereas we were tall and powerful, with yellow hair and light eyes. But they were cast in the same mold, for all of that. These Children of the Night seemed not human to us, with their deformed dwarfish bodies, yellow skin and hideous faces. Aye—they were reptiles—vermin.

And my brain was like to burst with fury when I thought that it was these vermin on whom I was to glut my ax and perish. Bah! There is no glory slaying snakes or dying from their bites. All this rage and fierce disappointment turned on the objects of my hatred, and with the old red mist waving in front of me I swore by all the gods I knew, to wreak such red havoc before I died as to leave a dread memory in the minds of the survivors.

My people would not honor me, in such contempt they held the Children. But those Children that I left alive would remember me and shudder. So I swore, gripping savagely my ax, which was of bronze, set in a cleft of the oaken haft and fastened securely with rawhide.

Now I heard ahead a sibilant, abhorrent murmur, and a vile stench filtered to me through the trees, human, yet less than human. A few moments more and I emerged from the deep shadows into a wide open space. I had never before seen a village of the Children. There was a cluster of earthen domes, with low doorways sunk into the ground; squalid dwelling-places, half above and half below the earth. And I knew from the talk of the old warriors that these dwelling-places were connected by underground corridors, so the whole village was like an ant-bed, or a system of snake holes. And I wondered if other tunnels did not run off under the ground and emerge long distances from the villages.

Before the domes clustered a vast group of the creatures, hissing and jabbering at a great rate.

I HAD quickened my pace, and now as I burst from cover, I was running with the fleetness of my race. A wild clamor went up from the rabble as they saw the avenger, tall, blood-stained and blazing-eyed leap from the forest, and I cried out fiercely, flung the dripping head among them and bounded like a wounded tiger into the thick of them.

Oh, there was no escape for them now! They might have taken to their tunnels but I would have followed, even to the guts of hell. They knew they must slay me, and they closed around, a hundred strong, to do it.

There was no wild blaze of glory in my brain as there had been against worthy foes. But the old berserk madness of my race was in my blood and the smell of blood and destruction in my nostrils.

I know not how many I slew. I only know that they thronged about me in a writhing, slashing mass, like serpents

about a wolf, and I smote until the ax-edge turned and bent and the ax became no more than a bludgeon; and I smashed skulls, split heads, splintered bones, scattered blood and brains in one red sacrifice to Il-marinen, god of the Sword People.

Bleeding from half a hundred wounds, blinded by a slash across the eyes, I felt a flint knife sink deep into my groin and at the same instant a cudgel laid my scalp open. I went to my knees but reeled up again, and saw in a thick red fog a ring of leering, slant-eyed faces. I lashed out as a dying tiger strikes, and the faces broke in red ruin.

And as I sagged, overbalanced by the fury of my stroke, a taloned hand clutched my throat and a flint blade was driven into my ribs and twisted venomously. Beneath a shower of blows I went down again, but the man with the knife was beneath me, and with my left hand I found him and broke his neck before he could writhe away.

Life was waning swiftly; through the hissing and howling of the Children I could hear the voice of Il-marinen. Yet once again I rose stubbornly, through a very whirlwind of cudgels and spears. I could no longer see my foes, even in a red mist. But I could feel their blows and knew they surged about me. I braced my feet, gripped my slippery ax-haft with both hands, and calling once more on Il-marinen I heaved up the ax and struck one last terrific blow. And I must have died on my feet, for there was no sensation of falling; even as I knew, with a last thrill of savagery, that I slew, even as I felt the splintering of skulls beneath my ax, darkness came with oblivion.

* * * * * * *

I CAME suddenly to myself. I was half reclining in a big armchair and Conrad was pouring water on me. My head ached and a trickle of blood had half dried on my face. Kirowan, Taverel and Clemants were hovering about, anxiously, while Ketrick stood just in front of me, still holding the mallet, his face schooled to a polite perturbation which his eyes did not show. And at the sight of those cursed eyes a red madness surged up in me.

"There," Conrad was saying, "I told you he'd come out of it in a moment; just a light crack. He's taken harder than that. All right now, aren't you, O'Donnel?"

At that I swept them aside, and with a single low snarl of hatred launched myself at Ketrick. Taken utterly by surprize he had no opportunity to defend himself. My hands locked on his throat and we crashed together on the ruins of a divan. The others cried out in amazement and horror and sprang to separate us—or rather, to tear me from my victim, for already Ketrick's slant eyes were beginning to start from their sockets.

"For God's sake, O'Donnel," exclaimed Conrad, seeking to break my grip, "what's come over you? Ketrick didn't mean to hit you—let go, you idiot!"

A fierce wrath almost overcame me at these men who were my friends, men of my own tribe, and I swore at them and their blindness, as they finally managed to tear my strangling fingers from Ketrick's throat. He sat up and choked and explored the blue marks my fingers had left, while I raged and cursed, nearly defeating the combined efforts of the four to hold me.

"You fools!" I screamed. "Let me go! Let me do my duty as a tribesman! You blind fools! I care nothing for the paltry blow he dealt me—he and his dealt stronger blows than that against me, in bygone ages. You fools, he is marked

with the brand of the beast—the reptile —the vermin we exterminated centuries ago! I must crush him, stamp him out, rid the clean earth of his accursed pollution!"

So I raved and struggled, and Conrad gasped to Ketrick over his shoulder: "Get out, quick! He's out of his head! His mind is unhinged! Get away from him."

Now I look out over the ancient dreaming downs and the hills and deep forests beyond and I ponder. Somehow, that blow from that ancient accursed mallet knocked me back into another age and another life. While I was Aryara I had no cognizance of any other life. It was no dream; it was a stray bit of reality wherein I, John O'Donnel, once lived and died, and back into which I was snatched across the voids of time and space by a chance blow. Time and times are but cogwheels, unmatched, grinding on oblivious to one another. Occasionally—oh, very rarely!—the cogs fit; the pieces of the plot snap together momentarily and give men faint glimpses beyond the veil of this everyday blindness we call reality.

I am John O'Donnel and I was Aryara, who dreamed dreams of war-glory and hunt-glory and feast-glory and who died on a red heap of his victims in some lost age. But in what age and where?

The last I can answer for you. Mountains and rivers change their contours; the landscapes alter; but the downs least of all. I look out upon them now and I remember them, not only with John O'Donnel's eyes, but with the eyes of Aryara. They are but little changed. Only the great forest has shrunk and dwindled and in many, many places vanished utterly. But here on these very downs Aryara lived and fought and loved and in yonder forest he died. Kirowan was wrong. The little, fierce, dark Picts were not the first men in the Isles. There were beings before them—aye, the Children of the Night. Legends—why, the Children were not unknown to us when we came into what is now the isle of Britain. We had encountered them before, ages before. Already we had our myths of them. But we found them in Britain. Nor had the Picts totally exterminated them.

Nor had the Picts, as so many believe, preceded us by many centuries. We drove them before us as we came, in that long drift from the East. I, Aryara, knew old men who had marched on that century-long trek; who had been borne in the arms of yellow-haired women over countless miles of forest and plain, and who as youths had walked in the vanguard of the invaders.

As to the age—that I can not say. But I, Aryara, was surely an Aryan and my people were Aryans—members of one of the thousand unknown and unrecorded drifts that scattered yellow-haired, blue-eyed tribes all over the world. The Celts were not the first to come into western Europe. I, Aryara, was of the same blood and appearance as the men who sacked Rome, but mine was a much older strain. Of the language I spoke, no echo remains in the waking mind of John O'Donnel, but I knew that Aryara's tongue was to ancient Celtic what ancient Celtic is to modern Gaelic.

Il-marinen! I remember the god I called upon, the ancient, ancient god who worked in metals—in bronze then. For Il-marinen was one of the base gods of the Aryans from whom many gods grew; and he was Wieland and Vulcan in the ages of iron. But to Aryara he was Il-marinen.

And Aryara—he was one of many tribes and many drifts. Not alone did the

Sword People come or dwell in Britain. The River People were before us and the Wolf People came later. But they were Aryans like us, light-eyed and tall and blond. We fought them, for the reason that the various drifts of Aryans have always fought each other, just as the Achæans fought the Dorians, just as the Celts and Germans cut each other's throats; aye, just as the Hellenes and the Persians, who were once one people and of the same drift, split in two different ways on the long trek and centuries later met and flooded Greece and Asia Minor with blood.

Now understand, all this I did not know as Aryara. I, Aryara, knew nothing of all these world-wide drifts of my race. I knew only that my people were conquerors, that a century ago my ancestors had dwelt in the great plains far to the east, plains populous with fierce, yellow-haired, light-eyed people like myself; that my ancestors had come westward in a great drift; and that in that drift, when my tribesmen met tribes of other races, they trampled and destroyed them, and when they met other yellow-haired, light-eyed people, of older or newer drifts, they fought savagely and mercilessly, according to the old, illogical custom of the Aryan people. This Aryara knew, and I, John O'Donnel, who know much more and much less than I, Aryara, knew, have combined the knowledge of these separate selves and have come to conclusions that would startle many noted scientists and historians.

Yet this fact is well known: Aryans deteriorate swiftly in sedentary and peaceful life. Their proper existence is a nomadic one; when they settle down to an agricultural existence, they pave the way for their downfall; and when they pen themselves in with city walls, they seal their doom. Why, I, Aryara, remember the tales of the old men—how the Sons of the Sword, on that long drift, found villages of white-skinned, yellow-haired people who had drifted into the west centuries before and had quit the wandering life to dwell among the dark, garlic-eating people and gain their sustenance from the soil. And the old men told how soft and weak they were, and how easily they fell before the bronze blades of the Sword People.

Look—is not the whole history of the Sons of Aryan laid on those lines? Look—how swiftly has Persian followed Mede; Greek, Persian; Roman, Greek; and German, Roman. Aye, and the Norsemen followed the Germanic tribes when they had grown flabby from a century or so of peace and idleness, and despoiled the spoils they had taken in the southland.

But let me speak of Ketrick. Ha—the short hairs at the back of my neck bristle at the very mention of his name. An atavism—aye! A reversion to type—but not to the type of some cleanly Chinaman or Mongol of recent times. The Danes drove his ancestors into the hills of Wales; and there, in what mediæval century, and in what foul way did that cursed aboriginal taint creep into the clean Saxon blood of the Celtic line, there to lie dormant so long? The Celtic Welsh never mated with the Children any more than the Picts did. But there must have been survivals—vermin lurking in those grim hills, that had outlasted their time and age. In Aryara's day they were scarcely human. What must a thousand years of retrogression have done to the breed?

What foul shape stole into the Ketrick castle on some forgotten night, or rose out of the dusk to grip some woman of the line, straying in the hills?

The mind shrinks from such an image. But this I know: there must have been survivals of that foul, reptilian epoch when the Ketricks went into Wales.

There still may be. But this changeling, this waif of darkness, this horror who bears the noble name of Ketrick, the brand of the serpent is upon him, and until he is destroyed there is no rest for me. Now that I know him for what he is, he pollutes the clean air and leaves the slime of the snake on the green earth. The sound of his lisping, hissing voice fills me with crawling horror and the sight of his slanted eyes inspires me with madness.

For I come of a royal race, and such as he is a continual insult and a threat, like a serpent under foot. Mine is a regal race, though now it is become degraded and falls into decay by continual admixture with conquered races. The waves of alien blood have washed my hair black and my skin dark, but I still have the lordly stature and the blue eyes of a royal Aryan.

And as my ancestors—as I, Aryara, destroyed the scum that writhed beneath our heels, so shall I, John O'Donnel, exterminate the reptilian thing, the monster bred of the snaky taint that slumbered so long unguessed in clean Saxon veins, the vestigial serpent-things left to taunt the Sons of Aryan. They say the blow I received affected my mind; I know it but opened my eyes. Mine ancient enemy walks often on the moors alone, attracted, though he may not know it, by ancestral urgings. And on one of these lonely walks I shall meet him, and when I meet him, I will break his foul neck with my hands, as I, Aryara, broke the necks of foul night-things in the long, long ago.

Then they may take me and break my neck at the end of a rope if they will. I am not blind, if my friends are. And in the sight of the old Aryan god, if not in the blinded eyes of men, I will have kept faith with my tribe.

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# FUTILITY

*By* **C. A. LIVINGSTON**

Foolish mortal: just a spasm
In a bit of protoplasm.
Though you squirm and kick about
Never can you wiggle out.

Tiny atom: bit of matter—
Clench your fists and batter, batter!
'Gainst those walls that hold you tight
Futile is your feeble fight.

Hopeless is it: Not a chance;
Just some little sparks that dance,
Briefly, vainly, then go out—
Tell me what it's all about?

# A RENDEZVOUS IN AVEROIGNE

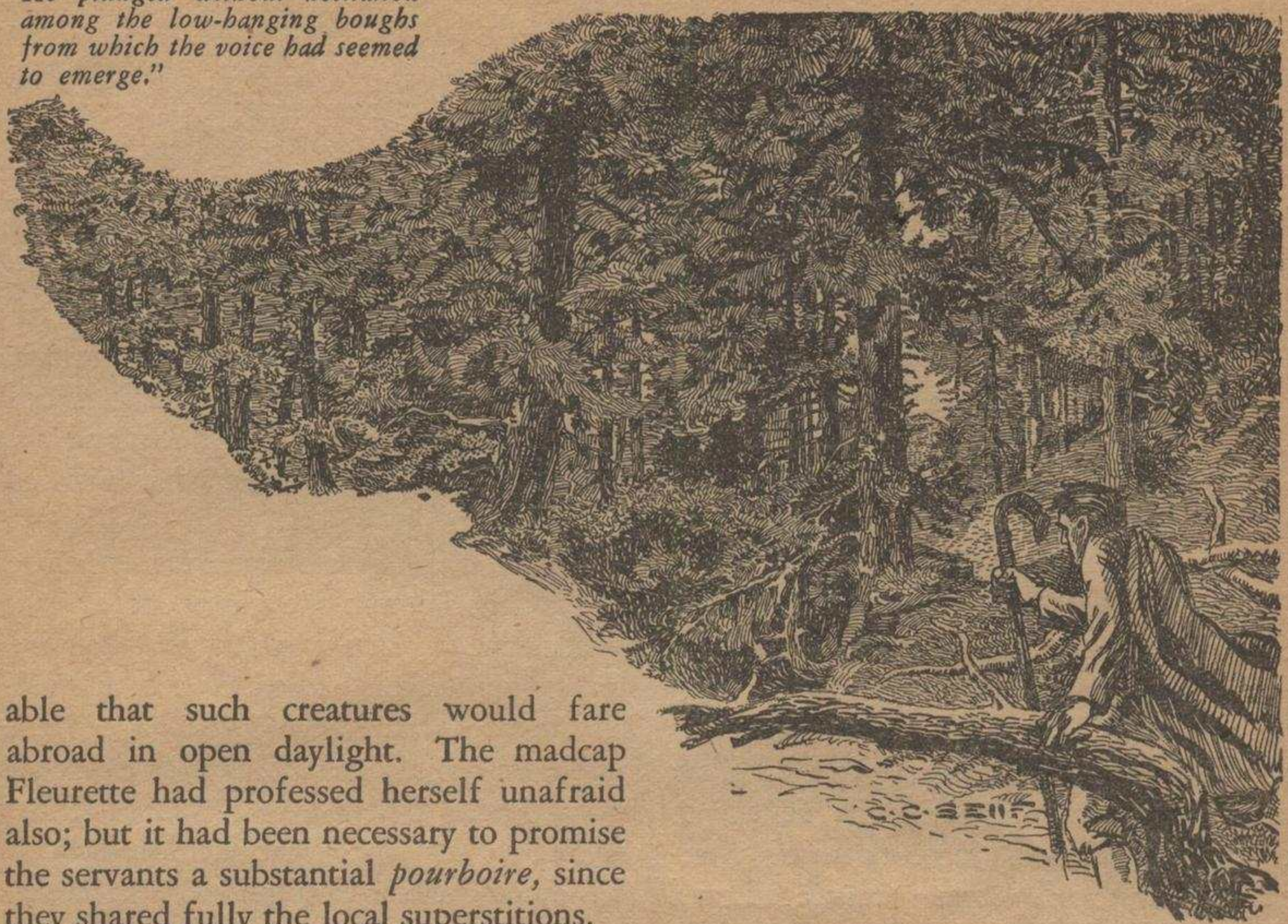
## *By* CLARK ASHTON SMITH

*An unusual host was the Sieur du Malinbois—a strange story of the Undead*

GERARD DE L'AUTOMNE was meditating the rimes of a new ballade in honor of Fleurette, as he followed the leaf-arrassed pathway toward Vyones through the woodland of Averoigne. Since he was on his way to meet Fleurette, who had promised to keep a rendezvous among the oaks and beeches like any peasant girl, Gerard himself made better progress than the ballade. His love was at that stage which, even for a professional troubadour, is more productive of distraction than inspiration; and he was recurrently absorbed in a meditation upon other than merely verbal felicities.

The grass and trees had assumed the fresh enamel of a mediæval May; the turf was figured with little blossoms of azure and white and yellow, like an ornate broidery; and there was a pebbly stream that murmured beside the way, as if the voices of undines were parleying deliciously beneath its waters. The sun-lulled air was laden with a wafture of youth and romance; and the longing that welled from the heart of Gerard seemed to mingle mystically with the balsams of the wood.

Gerard was a *trouvère* whose scant years and many wanderings had brought him a certain renown. After the fashion of his kind he had roamed from court to court, from château to château; and he was now the guest of the Comte de la Frênaie, whose high castle held dominion over half the surrounding forest. Visiting one day that quaint cathedral town, Vyones, which lies so near to the ancient wood of Averoigne, Gerard had seen Fleurette, the daughter of a well-to-do mercer named Guillaume Cochin; and had become more sincerely enamored of her blond piquancy than was to be expected from one who had been so frequently susceptible in such matters. He had manged to make his feelings known to her; and, after a month of billets-doux, ballads and stolen interviews contrived by the help of a complaisant waiting-woman, she had made this woodland tryst with him in the absence of her father from Vyones. Accompanied by her maid and a man-servant, she was to leave the town early that afternoon and meet Gerard under a certain beech-tree of enormous age and size. The servants would then withdrew discreetly; and the lovers, to all intents and purposes, would be alone. It was not likely that they would be seen or interrupted; for the gnarled and immemorial wood possessed an ill-repute among the peasantry. Somewhere in this wood there was the ruinous and haunted Châuteau des Faussesflammes; and, also, there was a double tomb, within which the Sieur Hugh du Malinbois and his chatelaine, who were notorious for sorcery in their time, had lain unconsecrated for more than two hundred years. Of these, and their phantoms, there were grisly tales; and there were stories of loup-garous and goblins, of fays and devils and vampires that infested Averoigne. But to these tales Gerard had given little heed, considering it improb-



*"He plunged without hesitation among the low-hanging boughs from which the voice had seemed to emerge."*

able that such creatures would fare abroad in open daylight. The madcap Fleurette had professed herself unafraid also; but it had been necessary to promise the servants a substantial *pourboire,* since they shared fully the local superstitions.

Gerard had wholly forgotten the legendry of Averoigne, as he hastened along the sun-flecked path. He was nearing the appointed beech-tree, which a turn of the path would soon reveal; and his pulses quickened and became tremulous, as he wondered if Fleurette had already reached the trysting-place. He abandoned all effort to continue his ballade, which, in the three miles he had walked from La Frênaie, had not progressed beyond the middle of a tentative first stanza.

His thoughts were such as would befit an ardent and impatient lover. They were now interrupted by a shrill scream that rose to an unendurable pitch of fear and horror, issuing from the green stillness of the pines beside the way. Startled, he peered at the thick branches; and as the sceram fell back to silence, he heard the sound of dull and hurrying footfalls, and a scuffling as of several bodies. Again the scream arose. It was plainly the voice of a woman in some distressful peril. Loosening his dagger in its sheath, and clutching more firmly a long hornbeam staff which he had brought with him as a protection against the vipers which were said to lurk in Averoigne, he plunged without hesitation or premeditation among the low-hanging boughs from which the voice had seemed to emerge.

In a small open space beyond the trees, he saw a woman who was struggling with three ruffians of exceptionally brutal and evil aspect. Even in the haste and vehemence of the moment, Gerard realized that he had never before seen such men or such a woman. The woman was clad in a gown of emerald green that matched her eyes; in her face was the pallor of dead things, together with a faery beauty; and her lips were dyed as with the scarlet of newly flowing blood. The men were dark as Moors, and their eyes were red slits of flame beneath oblique brows with animal-like bristles.

There was something very peculiar in the shape of their feet; but Gerard did not realize the exact nature of the peculiarity till long afterward. Then he remembered that all of them were seemingly club-footed, though they were able to move with surpassing agility. Somehow, he could never recall what sort of clothing they had worn.

The woman turned a beseeching gaze upon Gerard as he sprang forth from amid the boughs. The men, however, did not seem to heed his coming; though one of them caught in a hairy clutch the hands which the woman sought to reach toward her rescuer.

Lifting his staff, Gerard rushed upon the ruffians. He struck a tremendous blow at the head of the nearest one—a blow that should have leveled the fellow to earth. But the staff came down on unresisting air, and Gerard staggered and almost fell headlong in trying to recover his equilibrium. Dazed and uncomprehending, he saw that the knot of struggling figures had vanished utterly. At least, the three men had vanished; but from the middle branches of a tall pine beyond the open space, the death-white features of the woman smiled upon him for a moment with faint, inscrutable guile ere they melted among the needles.

GERARD understood now; and he shivered as he crossed himself. He had been deluded by phantoms or demons, doubtless for no good purpose; he had been the gull of a questionable enchantment. Plainly there was something after all in the legends he had heard, in the ill-renown of the forest of Averoigne.

He retraced his way toward the path he had been following. But when he thought to reach again the spot from which he had heard that shrill unearthly scream, he saw that there was no longer a path; nor, indeed, any feature of the forest which he could remember or recognize. The foliage about him no longer displayed a brilliant verdure; it was sad and funereal, and the trees themselves were either cypress-like, or were already sere with autumn or decay. In lieu of the purling brook there lay before him a tarn of waters that were dark and dull as clotting blood, and which gave back no reflection of the brown autumnal sedges that trailed therein like the hair of suicides, and the skeletons of rotting osiers that writhed above them.

Now, beyond all question, Gerard knew that he was the victim of an evil enchantment. In answering that beguileful cry for succor, he had exposed himself to the spell, had been lured within the circle of its power. He could not know what forces of wizardry or demonry had willed to draw him thus; but he knew that his situation was fraught with supernatural menace. He gripped the hornbeam staff more tightly in his hand, and prayed to all the saints he could remember, as he peered about for some tangible bodily presence of ill.

The scene was utterly desolate and lifeless, like a place where cadavers might keep their tryst with demons. Nothing stirred, not even a dead leaf; and there was no whisper of dry grass or foliage, no song of birds nor murmuring of bees, no sigh nor chuckle of water. The corpse-gray heavens above seemed never to have held a sun; and the chill, unchanging light was without source or destination, without beams or shadows.

Gerard surveyed his environment with a cautious eye; and the more he looked the less he liked it: for some new and disagreeable detail was manifest at every glance. There were moving lights in the wood that vanished if he eyed them intently; there were drowned faces in the tarn that came and went like livid bubbles before he could discern their features.

And, peering across the lake, he wondered why he had not seen the many-turreted castle of hoary stone whose nearer walls were based in the dead waters. It was so gray and still and vasty, that it seemed to have stood for incomputable ages between the stagnant tarn and the equally stagnant heavens. It was ancienter than the world, it was older than the light: it was coeval with fear and darkness; and a horror dwelt upon it and crept unseen but palpable along its bastions.

There was no sign of life about the castle; and no banners flew above its turrets or its donjon. But Gerard knew, as surely as if a voice had spoken aloud to warn him, that here was the fountain-head of the sorcery by which he had been beguiled. A growing panic whispered in his brain, he seemed to hear the rustle of malignant plumes, the mutter of demonian threats and plottings. He turned, and fled among the funereal trees.

Amid his dismay and wilderment, even as he fled, he thought of Fleurette and wondered if she were awaiting him at their place of rendezvous, or if she and her companions had also been enticed and led astray in a realm of damnable unrealities. He renewed his prayers, and implored the saints for her safety as well as his own.

The forest through which he ran was a maze of bafflement and eeriness. There were no landmarks, there were no tracks of animals or men; and the swart cypresses and sere autumnal trees grew thicker and thicker as if some malevolent will were marshalling them against his progress. The boughs were like implacable arms that strove to retard him; he could have sworn that he felt them twine about him with the strength and suppleness of living things. He fought them, insanely, desperately, and seemed to hear a crackling of infernal laughter in their twigs as he fought. At last, with a sob of relief, he broke through into a sort of trail. Along this trail, in the mad hope of eventual escape, he ran like one whom a fiend pursues; and after a short interval he came again to the shores of the tarn, above whose motionless waters the high and hoary turrets of that time-forgotten castle were still dominant. Again he turned and fled; and once more, after similar wanderings and like struggles; he came back to the inevitable tarn.

With a leaden sinking of his heart, as into some ultimate slough of despair and terror, he resigned himself and made no further effort to escape. His very will was benumbed, was crushed down as by the incumbence of a superior volition that would no longer permit his puny recalcitrance. He was unable to resist when a strong and hateful compulsion drew his footsteps along the margent of the tarn toward the looming castle.

When he came nearer, he saw that the edifice was surrounded by a moat whose waters were stagnant as those of the lake, and were mantled with the iridescent scum of corruption. The drawbridge was down and the gates were open, as if to receive an expected guest. But still there was no sign of human occupancy; and the walls of the great gray building were silent as those of a sepulcher. And more tomb-like even than the rest was the square and overtowering bulk of the mighty donjon.

IMPELLED by the same power that had drawn him along the lake-shore, Gerard crossed the drawbridge and passed beneath the frowning barbican into a vacant courtyard. Barred windows looked blankly down; and at the opposite end of the court a door stood mysteriously open, revealing a dark hall. As he approached the doorway, he saw that a man was standing on the threshold; though a mo-

ment previous he could have sworn that it was untenanted by any visible form.

Gerard had retained his hornbeam staff; and though his reason told him that such a weapon was futile against any supernatural foe, some obscure instinct prompted him to clasp it valiantly as he neared the waiting figure on the sill.

The man was inordinately tall and cadaverous, and was dressed in black garments of a superannuate mode. His lips were strangely red, amid his bluish beard and the mortuary whiteness of his face. They were like the lips of the woman who, with her assailants, had disappeared in a manner so dubious when Gerard had approached them. His eyes were pale and luminous as marsh-lights; and Gerard shuddered at his gaze and at the cold, ironic smile of his scarlet lips, that seemed to reserve a world of secrets all too dreadful and hideous to be disclosed.

"I am the Sieur du Malinbois," the man announced. His tones were both unctuous and hollow, and served to increase the repugnance felt by the young troubadour. And when his lips parted, Gerard had a glimpse of teeth that were unnaturally small and were pointed like the fangs of some fierce animal.

"Fortune has willed that you should become my guest," the man went on. "The hospitality which I can proffer you is rough and inadequate, and it may be that you will find my abode a trifle dismal. But at least I can assure you of a welcome no less ready than sincere."

"I thank you for your kind offer," said Gerard. "But I have an appointment with a friend; and I seem in some unaccountable manner to have lost my way. I should be profoundly grateful if you would direct me toward Vyones. There should be a path not far from here; and I have been so stupid as to stray from it."

The words rang empty and hopeless in his own ears even as he uttered them; and the name that his strange host had given —the Sieur du Malinbois—was haunting his mind like the funereal accents of a knell; though he could not recall at that moment the macabre and spectral ideas which the name tended to evoke.

"Unfortunately, there are no paths from my château to Vyones," the stranger replied. "As for your rendezvous, it will be kept in another manner, at another place, than the one appointed. I must therefore insist that you accept my hospitality. Enter, I pray; but leave your hornbeam staff at the door. You will have no need of it any longer."

Gerard thought that he made a move of distaste and aversion with his over-red lips as he spoke the last sentences; and that his eyes lingered on the staff with an obscure apprehensiveness. And the strange emphasis of his words and demeanor served to awaken other fantasmal and macabre thoughts in Gerard's brain; though he could not formulate them fully till afterward. And somehow he was prompted to retain the weapon, no matter how useless it might be against an enemy of spectral or diabolic nature. So he said:

"I must crave your indulgence if I retain the staff. I have made a vow to carry it with me, in my right hand or never beyond arm's reach, till I have slain two vipers."

"That is a queer vow," rejoined his host. "However, bring it with you if you like. It is of no matter to me if you choose to encumber yourself with a wooden stick."

He turned abruptly, motioning Gerard to follow him. The troubadour obeyed unwillingly, with one rearward glance at the vacant heavens and the empty courtyard. He saw with no great surprize that a sudden and furtive darkness had closed in upon the château without moon or star, as if it had been merely waiting

for him to enter before it descended. It was thick as the folds of a serecloth, it was airless and stifling like the gloom of a sepulcher that has been sealed for ages; and Gerard was aware of a veritable oppression, a corporeal and psychic difficulty in breathing, as he crossed the threshold.

He saw that cressets were now burning in the dim hall to which his host had admitted him; though he had not perceived the time and agency of their lighting. The illumination they afforded was singularly vague and indistinct, and the thronging shadows of the hall were unexplainably numerous, and moved with a mysterious disquiet; though the flames themselves were still as tapers that burn for the dead in a windless vault.

At the end of the passage, the Sieur du Malinbois flung open a heavy door of dark and somber wood. Beyond, in what was plainly the eating-room of the château, several people were seated about a long table by the light of cressets no less dreary and dismal than those in the hall. In the strange, uncertain glow, their faces were touched with a gloomy dubiety, with a lurid distortion; and it seemed to Gerard that shadows hardly distinguishable from the figures were gathered around the board. But nevertheless he recognized the assembled company at a glance, with an overpowering shock of astonishment.

At one end of the board, there sat the woman in emerald green who had vanished in so doubtful a fashion amid the pines when Gerard answered her call for succor. At one side, looking very pale and forlorn and frightened, was Fleurette Cochin. At the lower end reserved for retainers and inferiors, there sat the maid and the man-servant who had accompanied Fleurette to her rendezvous with Gerard.

The Sieur du Malinbois turned to the troubadour with a smile of sardonic amusement.

"I believe you have already met every one assembled," he observed. "But you have not yet been formally presented to my wife, Agathe, who is presiding over the board. Agathe, I bring to you Gerard de l'Automne, a young troubadour of much note and merit."

The woman nodded slightly, without speaking, and pointed to a chair opposite Fleurette. Gerard seated himself, and the Sieur du Malinbois assumed according to feudal custom a place at the head of the table beside his wife.

Now, for the first time, Gerard noticed that there were servitors who came and went in the room, setting upon the table various wines and viands. The servitors were preternaturally swift and noiseless, and somehow it was very difficult to be sure of their precise features or their costumes. They seemed to walk in an adumbration of sinister insoluble twilight. But the troubadour was disturbed by a feeling that they resembled the swart demoniac ruffians who had disappeared together with the woman in green when he approached them.

THE meal that ensued was a weird and funereal affair. A sense of insuperable constraint, of smothering horror and hideous oppression, was upon Gerard; and though he wanted to ask Fleurette a hundred questions, and also demand an explanation of sundry matters from his host and hostess, he was totally unable to frame the words or to utter them. He could only look at Fleurette, and read in her eyes a duplication of his own helpless bewilderment and nightmare thralldom. Nothing was said by the Sieur du Malinbois and his lady, who were exchanging glances of a secret and baleful intelligence all through the meal; and Fleurette's maid and man-

servant were obviously paralyzed by terror, like birds beneath the hypnotic gaze of deadly serpents.

The foods were rich and of strange savor; and the wines were fabulously old, and seemed to retain in their topaz or violet depths the unextinguished fire of buried centuries. But Gerard and Fleurette could barely touch them; and they saw that the Sieur du Malinbois and his lady did not eat or drink at all. The gloom of the chamber deepened; the servitors became more furtive and spectral in their movements; the stifling air was laden with unformulable menace, was constrained by the spell of a black and lethal necromancy. Above the aromas of the rare foods, the bouquets of the antique wines, there crept forth the choking mustiness of hidden vaults and embalmed centurial corruption, together with the ghostly spice of a strange perfume that seemed to emanate from the person of the chatelaine. And now Gerard was remembering many tales from the legendry of Averoigne, which he had heard and disregarded; was recalling the story of a Sieur du Malinbois and his lady, the last of the name and the most evil, who had been buried somewhere in this forest hundreds of years ago; and whose tomb was shunned by the peasantry since they were said to continue their sorceries even in death. He wondered what influence had bedrugged his memory, that he had not recalled it wholly when he had first heard the name. And he was remembering other things and other stories, all of which confirmed his instinctive belief regarding the nature of the people into whose hands he had fallen. Also, he recalled a folklore superstition concerning the use to which a wooden stake can be put; and realized why the Sieur du Malinbois had shown a peculiar interest in the hornbeam staff. Gerard had laid the staff beside his chair when he sat down; and he was reassured to find that it had not vanished. Very quietly and unobtrusively, he placed his foot upon it.

The uncanny meal came to an end; and the host and his chatelaine arose.

"I shall now conduct you to your rooms," said the Sieur du Malinbois, including all of his guests in a dark, inscrutable glance. "Each of you can have a separate chamber, if you so desire; or Fleurette Cochin and her maid Angelique can remain together; and the man-servant Raoul can sleep in the same room with Messire Gerard."

A preference for the latter procedure was voiced by Fleurette and the troubadour. The thought of uncompanioned solitude in that castle of timeless midnight and nameless mystery was abhorrent to an insupportable degree.

The four were now led to their respective chambers, on opposite sides of a hall whose length was but indeterminately revealed by the dismal lights. Fleurette and Gerard bade each other a dismayed and reluctant good-night beneath the constraining eye of their host. Their rendezvous was hardly the one which they had thought to keep; and both were overwhelmed by the supernatural situation amid whose dubious horrors and ineluctable sorceries they had somehow become involved. And no sooner had Gerard left Fleurette than he began to curse himself for a poltroon because he had not refused to part from her side; and he marvelled at the spell of drug-like involition that had bedrowsed all his faculties. It seemed that his will was not his own, but had been thrust down and throttled by an alien power.

The room assigned to Gerard and Raoul was furnished with a couch, and a great bed whose curtains were of antique fashion and fabric. It was lighted with tapers that had a funereal suggestion in

their form, and which burned dully in an air that was stagnant with the mustiness of dead years.

"May you sleep soundly," said the Sieur du Malinbois. The smile that accompanied and followed the words was no less unpleasant than the oily and sepulchral tone in which they were uttered. The troubadour and the servant were conscious of profound relief when he went out and closed the leaden-clanging door. And their relief was hardly diminished even when they heard the click of a key in the lock.

GERARD was now inspecting the room; and he went to the one window, through whose small and deep-set panes he could see only the pressing darkness of a night that was veritably solid, as if the whole place were buried beneath the earth and were closed in by clinging mold. Then, with an access of unsmothered rage at his separation from Fleurette, he ran to the door and hurled himself against it, he beat upon it with his clenched fists, but in vain. Realizing his folly, and desisting at last, he turned to Raoul.

"Well, Raoul," he said, "what do you think of all this?"

Raoul crossed himself before he answered; and his face had assumed the vizard of a mortal fear.

"I think, Messire," he finally replied, "that we have all been decoyed by a malefic sorcery; and that you, myself, the demoiselle Fleurette, and the maid Angelique, are all in deadly peril of both soul and body."

"That, also, is my thought," said Gerard. "And I believe it would be well that you and I should sleep only by turns; and that he who keeps vigil should retain in his hands my hornbeam staff, whose end I shall now sharpen with my dagger. I am sure that you know the manner in which it should be employed if there are any intruders; for if such should come, there would be no doubt as to their character and their intentions. We are in a castle which has no legitimate existence, as the guests of people who have been dead, or supposedly dead, for more than two hundred years. And such people, when they stir abroad, are prone to habits which I need not specify."

"Yes, Messire." Raoul shuddered; but he watched the sharpening of the staff with considerable interest. Gerard whittled the hard wood to a lance-like point, and hid the shavings carefully. He even carved the outline of a little cross near the middle of the staff, thinking that this might increase its efficacy or save it from molestation. Then, with the staff in his hand, he sat down upon the bed, where he could survey the litten room from between the curtains.

"You can sleep first, Raoul." He indicated the couch, which was near the door.

The two conversed in a fitful manner for some minutes. After hearing Raoul's tale of how Fleurette, Angelique and himself had been led astray by the sobbing of a woman amid the pines, and had been unable to retrace their way, the troubadour changed the theme. And henceforth he spoke idly and of matters remote from his real preoccupations, to fight down his torturing concern for the safety of Fleurette. Suddenly he became aware that Raoul had ceased to reply; and saw that the servant had fallen asleep on the couch. At the same time an irresistible drowsiness surged upon Gerard himself in spite of all his volition, in spite of the eldritch terrors and forebodings that still murmured in his brain. He heard through his growing hebetude a whisper as of shadowy wings in the castle halls; he caught the sibilation of ominous voices, like those of familiars that re-

spond to the summoning of wizards; and he seemed to hear, even in the vaults and towers and remote chambers, the tread of feet that were hurrying on malign and secret errands. But oblivion was around him like the meshes of a sable net; and it closed in relentlessly upon his troubled mind, and drowned the alarms of his agitated senses.

WHEN Gerard awoke at length, the tapers had burned to their sockets; and a sad and sunless daylight was filtering through the window. The staff was still in his hand; and though his senses were still dull with the strange slumber that had drugged them, he felt that he was unharmed. But peering between the curtains, he saw that Raoul was lying mortally pale and lifeless on the couch, with the air and look of an exhausted moribund.

He crossed the room, and stooped above the servant. There was a small red wound on Raoul's neck; and his pulses were slow and feeble, like those of one who has lost a great amount of blood. His very appearance was withered and vein-drawn. And a phantom spice arose from the couch—a lingering wraith of the perfume worn by the chatelaine Agathe.

Gerard succeeded at last in arousing the man; but Raoul was very weak and drowsy. He could remember nothing of what had happened during the night; and his horror was pitiful to behold when he realized the truth.

"It will be your turn next, Messire," he cried. "These vampires mean to hold us here amid their unhallowed necromancies till they have drained us of our last drop of blood. Their spells are like mandragora or the sleepy sirups of Cathay; and no man can keep awake in their despite."

Gerard was trying the door; and somewhat to his surprize he found it unlocked. The departing vampire had been careless, in the lethargy of her repletion. The castle was very still; and it seemed to Gerard that the animating spirit of evil was now quiescent; that the shadowy wings of horror and malignity, the feet that had sped on baleful errands, the summoning sorcerers, the responding familiars, were all lulled in a temporary slumber.

He opened the door, he tiptoed along the deserted hall, and knocked at the portal of the chamber allotted to Fleurette and her maid. Fleurette, fully dressed, answered his knock immediately; and he caught her in his arms without a word, searching her wan face with a tender anxiety. Over her shoulder he could see the maid Angelique, who was sitting listlessly on the bed with a mark on her white neck similar to the wound that had been suffered by Raoul. He knew, even before Fleurette began to speak, that the nocturnal experiences of the demoiselle and her maid had been identical with those of himself and the man-servant.

While he tried to comfort Fleurette and reassure her, his thoughts were now busy with a rather curious problem. No one was abroad in the castle; and it was more than probable that the Sieur du Malinbois and his lady were both asleep after the nocturnal feast which they had undoubtedly enjoyed. Gerard pictured to himself the place and the fashion of their slumber; and he grew even more reflective as certain possibilities occurred to him.

"Be of good cheer, sweetheart," he said to Fleurette. "It is in my mind that we may soon escape from this abominable mesh of enchantments. But I must leave you for a little and speak again with Raoul, whose help I shall require in a certain matter."

He went back to his own chamber.

The man-servant was sitting on the couch and was crossing himself feebly and muttering prayers with a faint, hollow voice.

"Raoul," said the troubadour a little sternly, "you must gather all your strength and come with me. Amid the gloomy walls that surround us, the somber ancient halls, the high towers and the heavy bastions, there is but one thing that veritably exists; and all the rest is a fabric of illusion. We must find the reality whereof I speak, and deal with it like true and valiant Christians. Come, we will now search the castle ere the lord and chatelaine shall awaken from their vampire lethargy."

He led the way along the devious corridors with a swiftness that betokened much forethought. He had reconstructed in his mind the hoary pile of battlements and turrets as he had seen them on the previous day; and he felt that the great donjon, being the center and stronghold of the edifice, might well be the place which he sought. With the sharpened staff in his hand, with Raoul lagging bloodlessly at his heels, he passed the doors of many secret rooms, the many windows that gave on the blindness of an inner court, and came at last to the lower story of the donjon-keep.

It was a large, bare room, entirely built of stone, and illumined only by narrow slits high up in the wall, that had been designed for the use of archers. The place was very dim; but Gerard could see the glimmering outlines of an object not ordinarily to be looked for in such a situation, that arose from the middle of the floor. It was a tomb of marble; and stepping nearer, he saw that it was strangely weather-worn and was blotched by lichens of gray and yellow, such as flourish only within access of the sun. The slab that covered it was doubly broad and massive, and would require the full strength of two men to lift.

Raoul was staring stupidly at the tomb. "What now, Messire?" he queried.

"You and I, Raoul, are about to intrude upon the bedchamber of our host and hostess."

At his direction, Raoul seized one end of the slab; and he himself took the other. With a mighty effort that strained their bones and sinews to the cracking-point, they sought to remove it; but the slab hardly stirred. At length, by grasping the same end in unison, they were able to tilt the slab; and it slid away and dropped to the floor with a thunderous crash. Within, there were two open coffins, one of which contained the Sieur Hugh du Malinbois and the other his lady Agathe. Both of them appeared to be slumbering peacefully as infants; a look of tranquil evil, of pacified malignity, was imprinted upon their features; and their lips were dyed with a fresher scarlet than before.

Without hesitation or delay, Gerard plunged the lance-like end of his staff into the bosom of the Sieur du Malinbois. The body crumbled as if it were wrought of ashes kneaded and painted to a human semblance; and a slight odor as of age-old corruption arose to the nostrils of Gerard. Then the troubadour pierced in like manner the bosom of the chatelaine. And simultaneously with her dissolution, the walls and floor of the donjon seemed to dissolve like a sullen vapor, they rolled away on every side with a shock as of unheard thunder. With a sense of indescribable vertigo and confusion Gerard and Raoul saw that the whole château had vanished like the towers and battlements of a bygone storm; that the dead lake and its rotting shores no longer offered their malefical illusions to the eye. They were standing in a forest-glade, in the full unshadowed light of the afternoon sun; and all that remained of the dismal castle was the lichen-mantled tomb that stood open

beside them. Fleurette and her maid were a little distance away; and Gerard ran to the mercer's daughter and took her in his arms. She was dazed with wonderment, like one who emerges from the night-long labyrinth of an evil dream, and finds that all is well.

"I think, sweetheart," said Gerard, "that our next rendezvous will not be interrupted by the Sieur du Malinbois and his chatelaine."

But Fleurette was still bemused with wonder, and could only answer him with a kiss.

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# FUNGI · from · YUGGOTH

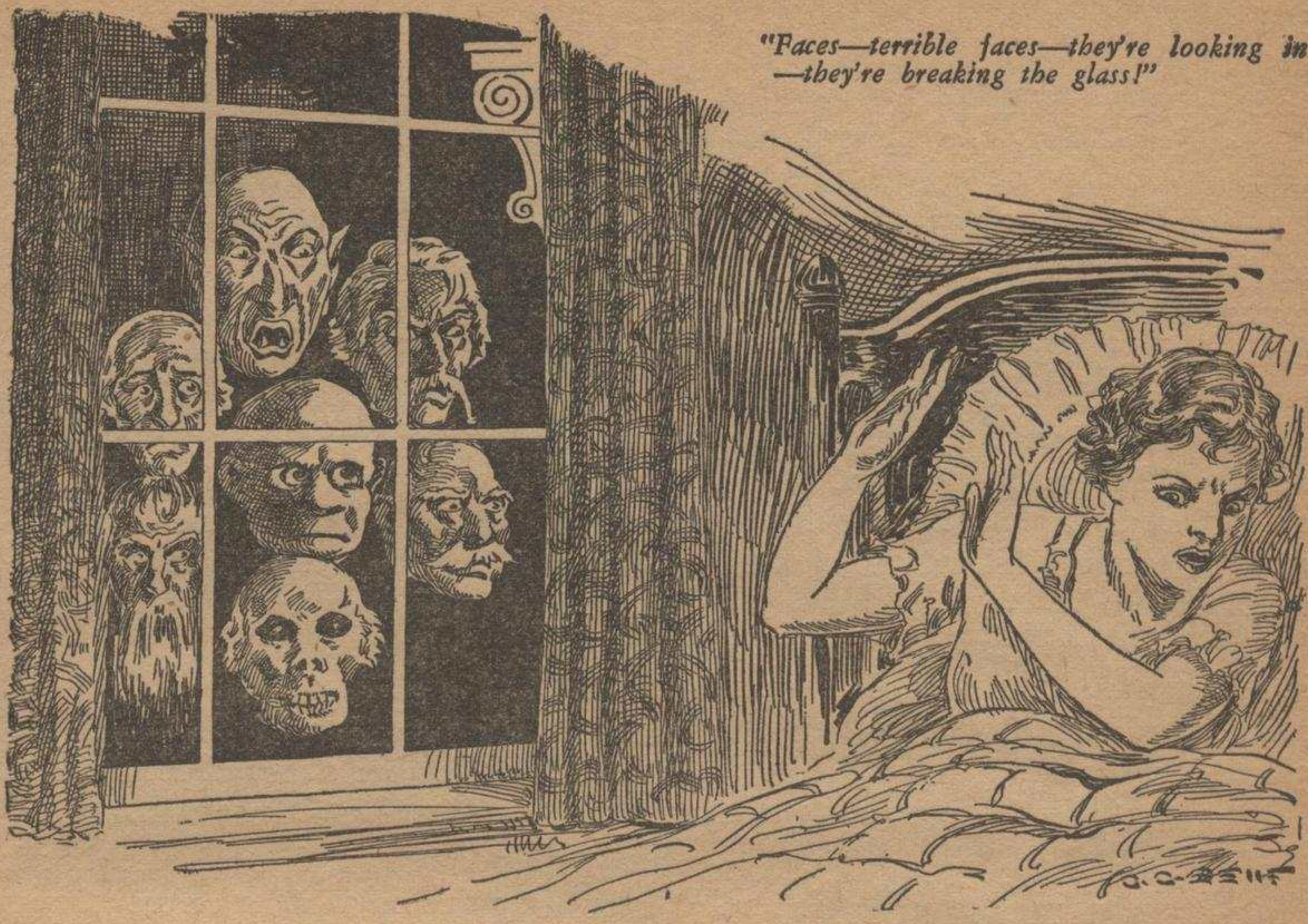
By H.P. LOVECRAFT



## 10. ALIENATION

His solid flesh had never been away,
For each dawn found him in his usual place,
But every night his spirit loved to race
Through gulfs and worlds remote from common day.
He had seen Yaddith, yet retained his mind,
And come back safely from the Ghooric zone,
When one still night across curved space was thrown
That beckoning piping from the voids behind.

He waked that morning as an older man,
And nothing since has looked the same to him.
Objects around float nebulous and dim—
False, phantom trifles of some vaster plan.
His folk and friends are now an alien throng
To which he struggles vainly to belong.



*"Faces—terrible faces—they're looking in —they're breaking the glass!"*

# THE DEAD-ALIVE

## *By* NAT SCHACHNER AND ARTHUR L. ZAGAT

*A shivery, blood-chilling, goose-flesh story of violated graveyards and cadavers that walked in the night*

ON A brilliant, sunshiny day in May of 1935, the unspeakable, unnamable crime had been committed! Carelessly, gayly the world moved in its accustomed grooves; men performed their routine tasks restlessly, haunted by visions of deep crystal pools overshadowed by rustling birches, the graceful arching leap of a speckled trout, the singing whine of line over reel; young lovers walked with a certain elate springiness, the wine of life flooding their veins. Not yet did mankind realize the import, the vileness of that deed. Soon, too soon, would a pall of horror overshadow the burgeoning earth.

On a like brilliant, sunshiny day in June of 1935, sat at his desk Hartley—to his friends, Buck—Saunders, erstwhile idol of football enthusiasts, All-American back—Princeton, 1934; now bond salesman for the conservative investment house of Clarke, Lambert & Co. But there was no spring or summer in his soul; he stared through the open window at the panorama of river traffic with blank, unseeing eyes. What mattered to him at this time sunshine and laughter, high-pressure salesmanship and the busy hum of men?

Only yesterday—ages ago it seemed—he had buried his father, his gentle, understanding father, stricken suddenly. Heart failure, the doctors said. Tragically

he had seen the lifeless form to its final abode—a cemetery in the Westchester hills.

By sheer force of will, he came down to the office this day, seeking surcease of sorrow in humdrum tasks. The staff had been properly sympathetic; but once he was at his desk, neatly labeled in brass with his formal name, the mass of papers awaiting him seemed devoid of meaning, of any content. So he shoved them aside, and stared listlessly into nothingness.

The telephone jangled. He ignored it. It rang louder, more insistently. Annoyed, Buck removed the receiver and placed it to his ear.

"Mr. Saunders?" It was the switchboard operator.

"Yes, what is it?" he asked impatiently.

"I have a call for you. Just a moment."

There was a little delay in making the connection. He was sorely tempted to hang up. Then he heard a brusk masculine voice.

"Mr. Hartley Saunders?" it queried.

"Well, what of it?" Damn these fools. Why couldn't they leave him alone!

"Police Headquarters speaking. Your father, John Saunders, was buried yesterday at Mountville Cemetery?"

A stab of pain shot through him at the matter-of-fact statement.

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"This is Detective Sergeant Riley. We have some important information we'd like to check up with you. Come down here to see me at once."

"But what is it all about—can't you tell me now?"

"Sorry, but that's impossible. I can't explain over the phone. Will expect you in half an hour. Good-bye."

Buck started to remonstrate, when he discovered that the line was dead.

Gone now was his apathy. His mind was keen and alert as ever. What did Police Headquarters know of his father's death and burial, and why this peremptory summons? A hundred hypotheses formed and faded in his whirling thoughts, and all were rejected as fantastic. There was only one thing to do: follow directions and see this Riley. Mechanically he put on his hat, muttered an unintelligible explanation to his chief, and fled out of the door.

A TAXI hurried over at his uplifted finger, the door slammed behind him, and he was speeding downtown.

The ride seemed interminable, but it was only twenty minutes before he was deposited in front of the formidable-looking building. He gave his name and errand to the stout policeman lolling at the front desk. Evidently he was expected, for almost immediately he was ushered into the presence of Detective Sergeant Riley.

The big, strong-jawed Irishman, iron-gray at the temples, leaned back in his chair and surveyed him thoughtfully a while. Buck grew restless under the protracted scrutiny and was about to demand an explanation, when the detective commenced abruptly.

"You're Hartley Saunders. Your father was buried in Mountville yesterday." He seemed to be ticking off invisible points.

Buck flinched, but nodded assent.

"This morning," Riley continued, "his grave was found open, the lid of the casket pried off, and his body removed. It has vanished without leaving a trace."

Buck jumped to his feet with an exclamation.

"What! my father's body gone? But

where—what happened——" he gasped for words.

Not unkindly the big detective motioned him back to his seat.

"That is just what we are trying to find out," he explained. "We have nothing to go on as yet. Let me give you the facts. Early this morning we received a call for assistance from the local police. I was assigned to the job. I wasn't exactly tickled about going—but I went. Orders are orders.

"When I reached the cemetery, I found a county detective in charge. It was no ordinary case of body-snatching, you must understand. The freshly made grave had been opened, the dirt was scattered all over the other graves, not in mounds, as you'd expect if dug up by a spade, but as if"—he hesitated for a moment—"as if it had come up in handfuls and been strewn about. The casket cover was violently wrenched open; yet we could find no marks on the wood, as would surely appear if crowbars or any *mechanical* implements were used to pry it up."

Buck Saunders was listening with growing horror, yet he remarked the queer emphasis the detective placed on the word "mechanical".

Riley continued his story. "The body was removed—clean vanished. There was a watchman on the grounds. They found him early this morning, walking about aimlessly, making queer, unintelligible noises. The police questioned him, but it was no use. The man was mad, stark gibbering mad. Only a few words could be understood in his moanings. Something about corpses that walked—ghosts. He died this noon, still raving!"

The big detective paused, and looked at his visitor strangely. Buck sat stricken, unable to speak. His poor father, thus to be denied peace even in his grave!

With elaborate casualness the policeman threw his bombshell. "And I forgot to tell you—there were no spade-marks down the sides of the grave, *but we did find the marks of fingers dug deep into the earthen walls.*"

Incredulously, Buck grasped the full horror of this simple statement. "Do you mean that men dug up my father's body, using only their fingers as tools?"

Gravely the detective nodded his head. "Impossible as it sounds, that seems the only logical conclusion from all the evidence. Yet if the grave-robbers were only men, why did the watchman go mad? There were no marks of violence on him—he had not been attacked. And what was that cryptic reference to dead men who walk? No—something happened last night—that watchman saw something so unbelievably horrible that it twisted his brain into madness. What it is we don't know yet, but we're going to find out," he concluded grimly.

Buck's face had grown hard and stern during the recital of this weird tale. Grim determination showed itself. "And I—I am going to run down these grave-robbers, these ghouls, whatever they prove themselves to be—men or fiends out of Hell!"

Riley nodded in understanding. "There is another thing, Mr. Saunders. We have been keeping it under cover—the newspapers know nothing about it yet, but this is not the only case. Within the past two weeks, there have been reports of similar outrages in a dozen cemeteries widely scattered over southern and eastern New York. In every instance the clues were the same—no spade or lever was used, and in each case clutching fingers had dug deep into the soil."

Buck arose; the very marrow in his bones seemed frozen; the iron had entered his soul. He extended his hand. "Thank you very much for telling me all

this. I've no doubt you will do your utmost to run down these fiends. But I shall not rest from this day on, until the guilty are brought to justice."

The brawny officer took his hand. "Never fear, we'll get them. But you, my lad, careful is the word. Don't try anything rash. You're up against something uncanny—horrible. Look out it doesn't get you."

"Don't worry; I can take care of myself," responded Buck grimly. Looking at his six feet of brawn and muscle, hardened on many a football field, the steely blue eyes and the firm line of his jaw, Riley was forced to confess that this confident young man would prove a formidable antagonist for any one.

BACK to the office Buck rode. His plans were formulated. A tangled excuse and he readily obtained leave of absence, his superior shaking his head sadly at the retreating figure. Once home he equipped himself with flashlight and automatic, and took an evening train to Mountville. As night fell dark and mysterious over the cemetery, white marble glimmering ghostly, he took his station, determined to watch the whole night through.

Morning found him still watching, soaked with the gray mists of early dawn, cramped with crouching, reeling from fatigue—but the vigil was fruitless. Mysterious sounds and noises there had been a-plenty, but the marauders had not returned.

Night after night Buck kept his lonely vigil, but in vain. Whatever it was that had ravaged the grave, it had no evident intention of returning.

Chilled and racked with the weariness of tense, sleepless watches, soul steeped in bitter anguish, Saunders was forced to admit defeat. Reluctantly he returned to the city. Perhaps, he thought, the police had been able to discover something in his absence. Eagerly he phoned Riley.

"No, my lad," boomed the hearty Irish voice, "we're as far from a solution as when we started. Farther; for reports of body-snatchings are coming in now thick and fast, from all over the state. Hundreds of them. All the same way. Must be a large group working. We've found out this though: *in every single instance the stolen corpse had been freshly buried!* No decayed bodies are taken. We've sent out secret instructions to have guards detailed to each cemetery immediately after a funeral. Didn't see anything, did you? No? Mighty lucky for you, I'm thinking. Don't try it again—there's something very horrible about it all. It'll break into the newspapers any day now—can't keep it away from them much longer. Good-bye."

And sure enough, next morning horror flaunted and screamed in huge headlines across the front page.

The fashionable Kenesco Cemetery was the milieu of a frightful crime. Two funeral processions had converged on that famous burial-ground the day before —one, that of an internationally famous financier; the other, of a beautiful society girl, the season's debutante, carried off untimely in the first blush of youth and happiness. Everything had gone according to schedule. The great concourse of friends and mourning relatives, the banked masses of floral tributes, the intoning of solemn rituals, the careful lowering of expensive bronze caskets, the tamping down of the all-embracing earth, the orderly dispersal of those who had gathered in anguish or curiosity. The earthly drama was over.

Alas, not yet! As evening cast its lengthening shadows over the wilderness of marble, two heavily armed state troopers, picked men, proven in many a des-

perate encounter, took their station in the shelter of a huge mausoleum on a knoll overlooking the graves. Their instructions were direct and succinct: "If any man, or beast, or thing, approaches the graves, shoot, and shoot to kill."

At two in the morning, a belated commuter hurrying home along a road past the great cemetery heard a shot crash through the blackness of the night. As he paused, affrighted, three others followed in quick succession. Silence. Then the sound of terrific struggle, and a piercing scream split the air. As it rose, it choked and strangled into a gurgling rattle. The commuter's blood froze in his veins; his feet were rooted to the spot. Then came another sound—an unearthly moaning, wailing, that rose and fell in a gamut of mortal agony. Like the unutterable cries of a lost soul in deadly torment, he described it afterward.

He paused not in his going. Deadly fear gave wings to his speed, nor did he slacken till he threw himself into bed, fully clothed, there to cower and tremble under blankets the balance of the night.

That morning, the sergeant of the troop, making his rounds, came upon a frightful scene. The two fresh graves were yawning wide, the bodies had disappeared! Near by, on the ground, lay the crumpled figure of a trooper. Eyes protruding half out of their sockets, mouth twisted in a final desperate scream, there was that upon his face that caused the sergeant, hardened veteran of the World War, to shudder and avert his gaze. That face, those eyes, had witnessed unutterable, unspeakable horrors. Near him lay his heavy service revolver, three shells exploded. About his neck were the deep red grooves of clawing fingers.

The other trooper was gone. An hour later he was found miles away, running and stumbling across a woodland patch, gun still clutched in hand, one cartridge fired—mad, stark mad. No human sounds came from his tortured throat, only rasping, frightful screams. He died at noon in a straitjacket, still screaming.

Impressions had been taken of every metallic object on the strangled trooper's uniform for possible finger prints, the account read. The experts were working on them now.

Buck read along with renewed horror. His youthful pleasant face set in hard lines of determination. A cold purposeful light steeled his eyes. "By Heaven, I shall run this down if it takes my life," he swore to himself. Job, vocation, livelihood—all were forgotten.

THAT afternoon he saw Riley at headquarters. The detective greeted him cordially. To him Buck stated his determination, and begged to be allowed to assist.

Riley looked at him quizzically; then his gaze sobered. "Boy, you don't know what you want to let yourself in for," he said gravely. "I've handled many crimes in my day, but this is something different. There are forces at work here that I'm afraid even to think of. It's going to be dangerous—damned dangerous."

"Are you afraid?" Buck shot at him.

The big man stiffened. "No one yet has dared say to Tim Riley's face that he's afraid, and don't you be the first one," he warned.

"No offense, sergeant, but I'm not afraid either. I think I can help on this—and I want to work with you. I can handle a gun pretty well, too. What do you say?"

Thoughtfully the policeman surveyed the eager figure before him, the stamped determination of it, the snapped set of the jaws. Then: "It's a little irregular, but I'll chance it. You're welcome to help."

Silently the two men shok hands.

"Now," commenced Riley, as they resumed their seats, "now that you're my unofficial assistant, I'll tell you of something that's absolutely unbelievable—so unbelievable that I don't credit it myself. Listen to this. You must have read in the newspapers that impressions were taken for finger prints on the dead body."

Buck nodded.

"Well," the detective seemed to be choosing his words, "our finger print expert reports that he found a well-defined thumb print on the button of the trooper's blouse."

Excitedly Buck leaned forward. At last something definite, something tangible to work on.

"He also reported," continued Riley slowly, "that he checked it on our records, and he found its mate. It is the thumb print of Tony the Mug, gangster, thug, murderer. We have his complete record on file."

An exclamation of joy burst from Buck. The mystery was solved. Find Tony the Mug, break up his gang, and the nightmares would cease. But there was no answering look of elation in the Irishman's eye. Instead, a strange pall of nameless horror seemed to settle on him.

Unheeding, Buck asked, "You've sent out orders to search for and arrest him, of course?"

"No, I have not," the detective answered slowly.

"But why not?" came the surprized reply. Then, and then only, did he look up and see the strangeness—almost the dread—on Riley's face.

"Because," the policeman had great difficulty in enunciating the words, *"because—Tony the Mug—was electrocuted for murder at Auburn Prison two weeks ago!"*

With incredulous horror Buck jumped to his feet. "But—but," he gasped, his heart pounded madly, "that is impossible—it can not be—my God, it must not be!"

The detective agreed, soberly. "Yet there are the facts."

Buck's brain whirled with horror. Vehemently he sought an outlet, a solution. Yes, yes, he had it! Aloud he sobbed his relief from the unutterable implication of those terrible facts.

Riley looked at him inquiringly.

"Of course, it's obvious," the words came tumbling. "This Tony was not killed by the current, only shocked into unconsciousness. Then when his relatives took away the 'dead' body, they were able to resuscitate him. There have been cases like that. And now he is robbing graves. That's it." The sweat dried on his forehead at his own easy explanation.

"Yes," agreed Riley, in a curious, flat tone. "I've heard of those cases. But there is no question that Tony is dead. The prison doctor pronounced him so. His body lay for a day, and since no one claimed it, he was buried in the prison cemetery the following day. Besides"—he leaned forward—*"Tony the Mug's grave was opened two nights later, and his body removed."*

"God," Buck felt weak, "what are we up against?"

"I don't know as yet, but I'll find out soon," was the grim rejoinder. He swung around, and spoke abruptly. "I'm going out tonight to watch a little cemetery I have in mind—Hopeville—it hasn't been disturbed yet. I've an idea an attempt will be made on it tonight. The larger ones have each a company of ten troopers on guard."

Buck arose. "I'll go with you."

Riley eyed him keenly. "Very well, meet me here at nine-thirty sharp. I'll have the police car waiting and we'll drive out."

PROMPTLY at nine-thirty Buck presented himself at headquarters. Riley was obviously waiting for him.

"All right, lad, let's go. Here, take this." He opened the drawer of his desk, and brought out a regulation police automatic. "Slip this in your pocket—you may need it. And these flashlights, too, one for each of us."

Buck took the proffered weapon and flashlight, and they started for the door. "Hold on a minute, my boy, until I get something else." A sudden thought had occurred to the detective and he turned back. He opened a wardrobe, and took out—a cavalry saber!

He met Saunders' surprized questioning stare somewhat sheepishly. "Just a relic of my cavalry adventures in the World War," he explained. "Had enlisted in that arm of the service for the duration of the war—knew how to handle horses pretty well. They gave me this pretty little toy and some spurs, then shipped me across. There we were bundled into a troop train—*huit chevaux, quarante hommes*—and rode standing up to the front. That sign on the cattle car was the only smell of a horse I had. All through the war I was a bloody doughboy—unhorsed."

Buck laughed. "And you've been on your legs ever since. But why the paraphernalia tonight? We're not attending a lodge meeting."

The big Irishman was good-humored. "All right, my lad, have your little joke. But something tells me—just another hunch—that this old saber may see more service tonight than it did in France. Remember those troopers up at Kenesco fired four shots—and hurt no one. They were dead shots, too."

Out into the anteroom they walked, the detective swinging the heavy weapon like a cane. The idling policemen stared in surprize; then as they moved toward the outer door, Buck distinctly heard the sound of snickering behind him. He stole a glance sideways at his companion and was mightily amused to see a brick-red slowly suffusing neck and countenance, but no other sign that he too had heard. Out they clanked into the street, Riley shutting the door behind him with a bang.

Hastily the detective gained the waiting car at the curb, and deposited his ungainly weapon with a sigh of relief. Buck seated himself at his side. Silently the car slipped into gear, and they were off. Up Fifth Avenue, through the Concourse, left turn to the Bronx River Parkway, on to White Plains they sped. There they turned right, branched off on a dirt road, and followed the twisting ribbon through the night toward Hopeville. A full two hours' drive. Not much was spoken by the two men—they were too busy with their own thoughts.

With scream of brakes and skid of tires, the car came to an abrupt halt under the pitchy darkness of a huge oak. "Here we are," whispered Riley. He switched out the lights. The night was black—there was no moon. Buck heard him fumbling; then a light leaped into being, and a glowing circle stabbed the darkness.

They got out somewhat stiffly, the policeman taking the cavalry saber. Over on the left glimmered faintly white headstones. They were at the cemetery. Two circles of light dancing irregularly on the broken ground, the two men cautiously picked their way through the marble wilderness until they reached a slight rise on which was built a granite mausoleum.

"Switch off your light," Riley whispered, snapping his off; "we park here for the night. There's a man buried yesterday in the grave in front of us."

Buck hastened to obey, and blackness unrelieved wrapt them about with an almost physical impact. Saunders glanced

at his wrist. The faint luminescence of his radium wrist watch showed eleven-thirty.

"Keep your gun ready at hand, lad, but don't be in any hurry to shoot, no matter what you see or hear. Wait till I give the word, and for God's sake, no noise." He could hear the ex-cavalry-man's sword softly deposited on the ground. They crouched, waiting, they knew not for what.

THE minutes dragged by. Now the moon was rising, a huge brass bowl climbing up the eastern horizon. A dull coppery illumination tinged the ground and gravestones uncannily—a weird half-light almost impenetrable to mortal eye. Nervously, Buck glanced at his watch again. One minute to midnight! His heart was thumping madly; ghosts of the outraged dead clustered and formed threateningly; faint gibberings and rustlings were conjured up by his heated imagination.

A hand gripped his wrist. Buck started violently, a cry of fear smothered in his throat. "Sssh!" came Riley's tense whisper; "do you hear it?"

Buck strained his ears. Sure enough, up from the road came the faint tramp, tramp of feet. Nearer and nearer, louder now—the steady ordered thump of feet marching in unison, like soldiers on parade; mechanical though, slow, spaced, lift, eternity of waiting, down on the ground, like a slow-motion picture of the old German goose-step. Buck felt his flesh prickle, and shudders coursed wildly up and down his spine.

Riley was whispering fiercely. "Get your gun ready, they're coming. Down low, so they can't see us. Don't move till I give the word." Saunders heard him pick up the saber. Down they crouched, waiting.

The noise of marching moved toward them like a wave, nearer, ever nearer. God! thought Buck, are they coming for us? Panic seized him, human flesh could not bear that frightful thump-thump. Just as he was on the verge of screaming, his finger tightened on the trigger in spite of warning, the horrible sound ceased. They had stopped, not thirty feet away.

Buck strained to pierce that weird unearthly light. Dimly to be descried were five figures—men, thank God!" wavering shadows, hardly visible. They clustered about the freshly made grave.

Then, to Buck's unutterable horror, the shadows stooped suddenly and clawed at the ground. Up into the air flew great handfuls of earth. With incredible speed the digging continued, the air was thick with flying dirt, pebbles fell rattling. Already the ghostly figures were half immersed in the opening grave.

Loudly, fiercely, Riley's voice shattered the night. "Hands up, you there, don't move an inch. We've got you covered."

Up went Buck's pistol, ready to shoot. Incredibly, there was no response. The silent figures kept on digging, clawing the earth, unmindful of the threat. It was ominous in its implications.

The detective's flashlight pierced the gloom, the wide circle of light played on those forms. Even as the glare enfolded them, the figures straightened, and as one being, slowly turned their heads toward the crouching pair.

"Merciful Mary, Mother of Saints!" burst a hoarse cry from the Irishman. Buck tried to scream, but couldn't. Never, to his dying day, would he forget that nightmare sight!

Ghastly gray were those faces — the corpse-like pallor of those who have passed beyond the bourne. Lank hair that lay damp on pallid foreheads. Cheeks that were oddly sunken, gray skin that stretched unpleasantly tight over protrud-

ing cheekbones; hands that hung loosely, ending in bony claw-fingers that twitched incessantly. An indefinable air of decay and corruption enveloped them. But most horrible of all—their eyes. Great fixed pupils that stared unwinking at the dazzling beams—stared at the pair, through them, and beyond them. The eyes of somnambulists, that betrayed no warm emotion, no human feeling, only the frightful stare of blankness—as though, Buck thought in terror, as though *there were no minds behind them.* He could see no eyelids, only the fixed unwinking eyes.

Even as they watched, paralyzed with fright, the dread figures galvanized into movement. Up went their right legs uniformly, down they came together, and slowly they advanced—on the crouching pair. Buck could hear Riley mumbling some old forgotten prayer. The pace grew faster—they broke into a trot, still the legs rising and falling together.

"Shoot!" screamed Tim Riley; "shoot before these banshees get us!"

Two pistols cracked simultaneously. With not a pause, the nightmares came on. Again and again the guns spoke. The bullets *must* have found their marks, but steadily, uninterruptedly the figures advanced. Buck felt his reason giving way under the horror.

"I knew it!" yelled the terrified detective; "they're not human, they're banshees! Run for your life." Up he caught his saber, and commenced to run. Saunders did not hesitate—he was right alongside, running as he had never run before.

On they sped, stumbling, tripping, crashing into gravestones, until their breathing came in great whistling sobs, Riley holding on to his great sword with desperate effort.

Buck glanced fearfully behind. The Things were running in unison, but one figure had pulled ahead, not twenty yards behind. "For God's sake, drop that damned sword, and *run.* It's right behind us," he gasped.

Too spent for words, the detective could only shake his head violently in the negative. Another hundred yards they ran, and fell. Again Saunders looked over his shoulder. The hideous Thing was only ten yards behind, and running stiffly, mechanically. He drew his gun, whirled and shot. Still it came on. Gasping with sudden fury, Riley turned. "Damn you," he screamed; "man, ghost or banshee, I run no farther. Come on if you want cold steel."

The Gray Thing rushed toward him. The big Irishman sidestepped swiftly, and swung the saber high. Down it descended with frightful force, caught the figure full on the shoulder. Such was the force of the blow that it sheared through shoulder and arm, and the arm fell thudding to the ground. The creature's momentum carried it on a while; then it wheeled and started back. The moonlight shone brightly on the gaping shoulder. The flesh was pallid gray, *and not a drop of blood oozed from the wound.* Back it ran, unmindful of its arm!

The men stared aghast. With a great yell, Riley whirled his sword and threw it at the advancing figure with all his strength. It caught the Thing full on the face, and knocked it to the ground.

The moment's respite was enough. Like a flash, the two men ran down the slope to the road, on wings of terror. Even as they gained the car, they saw five figures, one without an arm, descending the slope after them.

With trembling fingers Riley turned the switch, clashed into high, and the car was roaring drunkenly down the road—back to humankind and sanity.

FOR a week Buck lay delirious—in the throes of a violent brain fever. When he finally came to, weak but nor-

mal in pulse and mind, he found Tim Riley seated at his bedside.

"Well, lad, I sure am glad to see you out of it. You had a rough time, all right."

"And you, old-timer, how do you feel?"

"O. K. now. Was laid up for two days, but snapped out of it. I'm too tough to knuckle under long."

"What's been happening, Tim, while I've been lying here?" inquired Buck weakly.

"Here, you, go back to sleep," responded the detective gruffly. "You're not well yet by a long shot. See you in a couple of days and tell you all the news." With that Riley left abruptly.

True to his promise, the detective called two days later. Buck was up now, feeling as strong as ever, and rearing to go. Only that fool nurse of his insisted on his staying in, and refused steadily to get him any papers.

After the first cordial salutations, they sat down comfortably to talk. Only now did Buck see the drawn, haggard look on the policeman's face.

"Tell me what's been happening," urged Saunders.

"Hell's broken loose," Riley replied, slowly. "And when I say Hell, I mean it literally. Those damned banshees"—he crossed himself devoutly, this son of old Erin—"are no longer haunting graves. They're swarming over the whole countryside. People are scared to death. When it comes dark, every one locks himself up tight; they don't dare go out. Last Wednesday a child of twelve disappeared near Schoharie; she hasn't been found yet. The next night a woman was found dead on the highway, a little out of West Point. She was strangled — hideously. Then it spread down through Jersey and over into Westchester. Men have been frightened out of their wits, meeting one of them suddenly on a dark road. They have been shot at, but bullets don't hurt them. *We* know that." He shuddered. "I don't know where it's going to end, but if they aren't shipped back to Hell soon——" The pause was significant.

Buck had been listening in rapt attention. "They nearly did for me, Tim. But just wait until I get back on my legs again. I've got something glimmering in my mind."

The detective arose. "O. K., lad, just you rest up first," he said soothingly. "Then we'll dope something out together. Meanwhile troops are patrolling all the main roads. So long, and take good care of yourself."

BUCK watched the burly form disappear through the doorway, then fell back exhausted. He was weaker than he thought.

He was dozing off when the door flew open and a girl darted into the room.

"Buck, darling, what has happened to you?" she cried.

"Ruth—you here!" the sick man sat up in astonishment. "Where on earth did you come from? I thought you were out on the coast with your folks."

"I was," she declared airily, "but I became fed up with the eternal sunshine and the Native Sons, so I decided to come back East—and here I am."

Buck gazed tenderly at his fiancée, Ruth Forsythe. Dark, vivacious, black eyes dancing, features finely modelled, adorably pursed mouth, she was a sight to make any normal male's heart beat a bit faster. There flashed into Saunders' mind the memory of that day, when, asked to choose between himself and Jim Carruthers, brilliant classmate of his at college, both desperately in love with Ruth, she had unhesitatingly turned to him, and kissed him full on the mouth. Nor could he forget the distorted features

of Jim, as he saw the girl he loved in his rival's arms. Muttering an imprecation, he had seized his hat, clapped it violently on his head, and departed like a storm out of the house — and out of sight. From that day on, no one had seen him again. That was six months ago. What a pity, too! The man was a brilliant biologist; his professors had envisioned a marvelous career for him.

"Why do you look at me so strangely, dearest?" asked Ruth, somewhat startled.

Buck came to himself with a start. "Nothing, darling. Just thinking of old times, and so tickled to see you again."

"But, darling," she seated herself at his side, all anxiety, "what has happened to you? The nurse tells me you staggered in early one morning talking incoherently and took to bed at once with high fever. Tell me all about it."

So Buck, one arm comfortably around the girl, told her all about it, omitting nothing from the desecration of his father's grave to his last desperate adventure.

As he proceeded, Ruth's eyes widened with the horror of it all, and her arms tightened about him. "Oh you poor, poor boy," she crooned, "how glad I am you are alive! No wonder you almost went mad from it." She shuddered at the thought.

"Now you just lie down and rest," she urged; "you're still very weak. "I'll go home, unpack, and be here first thing in the morning to be with you."

"But," Buck objected, "your house is closed—there is no one on the place."

"I have the keys. And I'm not afraid to sleep alone."

"No, you must not go—I'm afraid for you. It's country where you are; there are no houses close by. Those terrible Things are filtering down through Westchester, too."

Laughingly, Ruth answered his protestations. It was all nonsense! The morning paper gave the nearest reported visitation some thirty miles north, so there was nothing to be alarmed about. Besides, it was just for the night, drop some clothes, pick up some others, and come back to town.

So Buck was overborne against his will. He saw her go, and presentiment of evil clamored at his heart. He called after her to return, not to go, but it was too late—she was gone.

Night came. The nurse entered, took his temperature, counted his pulse, did the numerous little things appropriate to a sickroom, and withdrew.

The hall clock struck ten, but Buck could not sleep. Anxiety for Ruth tormented him. Why had he let her go? The hour of midnight chimed, and still he was awake. He was cursing himself for a fool.

Hardly had the last note faded on the air, when the sharp ringing of the telephone took up the refrain. Half sick with apprehension, Saunders was out of bed in a jiffy, snatched up a dressing-gown, and ran to answer.

With hand that trembled, he picked up the receiver. "Hulloa!"

Ruth's voice came to him, taut, desperate in its urgency.

"Buck, Buck, something's at my window. Faces—terrible faces, they're looking in—they're breaking the glass. Oh my God, Buck, do something! Save me!" Her voice rose to a scream!

Frantically he answered. "Quick, hang up, call police at once. I'll phone too, and come right away."

At the other end he heard a sob of relief. "Buck—at the other window, I see Jim. Jim Carruthers. He's breaking in. He'll save me—save me! I'm going to him. Good-bye."

Buck was almost crazy with anguish. He heard the receiver drop, heard foot-

steps, heard a call, then a scream of terror, a scream that choked and was still.

In frantic haste he dressed. His heart pounded and hammered; his brain reeled. "God," he prayed, "what have they done to my darling, my own, my Ruth? If anything happened, I'll tear them to pieces with my hands. Devils, banshees or men!"

In one minute he was dashing out of the darkened silent house. In another minute he had run his car out of the garage, swung about on the road to Tilton Heights, where the Forsythes had their home; and throttle wide open, he roared into the night.

The speedometer showed fifty miles, sixty, sixty-five. "Hurry, hurry!" beat his heart. "Faster, faster," raced the blood in his veins. Grimly he held the car to the road, as it careened over the lonely concrete. It was fifteen miles. "Let me get there in time," he prayed.

Jim—what was Jim doing out there? He had disappeared months ago. He had loved Ruth once. Why was he breaking through one window, and the Things through another. Why had Ruth's call turned to a scream?

A blinding illumination lit up everything in Buck's mind. That was it! Jim Carruthers, Jim—was responsible for it all! These horrors—they were connected in some way with Jim. He had abducted Ruth. A fury of rage swept over Buck. The damned beast, the cowardly hound! He'd make him pay; he'd find that scoundrel even if he hid himself in the bowels of the earth.

WITH screaming brakes the car slithered to a stop. It was the Forsythe's house. Before the car stopped rolling, Saunders was out of it, flashlight in hand, and up the wide stone steps. Furiously he pounded on the door. There was no answer. With all his strength he heaved against it, but it was too sturdy to break down. Abandoning the front, Buck ran around the side of the house, frantic with despair. What he saw brought him to a dead halt—heartsick. Two of the casement windows giving on the living-room were shattered, shards of broken glass were scattered over the green lawn, and the turf under the window was trampled as though with many feet.

In a moment he was pulling himself through the jagged pane, unmindful of the sharp edges that lacerated and tore his flesh. The flashlight lit up a scene of destruction; fragments of shattered vases covered the rumpled rugs, the telephone dragged on the floor, the receiver off. In plain language the room told its story of a struggle and abduction. A faint noise seemed to emanate from somewhere—a buzzing that was ominous in the dead silence of that desolation. Instantly Buck was on the alert, gun drawn, and flashing wide arcs over the room. Nothing appeared, but the buzz continued. As the telephone swam into the circle of light, Saunders found the explanation. Central was trying to signal that the receiver was off the hook.

Cautiously, thoroughly, Buck searched through the house. Ruth was gone. Like a vacant shell, bereft of life, of more than life—empty, resonant, mourning its lost soul, seemed the old mansion.

Back to the ground underneath the broken windows went the tortured lover. He picked up the trail of trampled grass, followed it down to the road, where it vanished into the stony macadam. Buck felt the anguish of utter helplessness sweep over him. What could be done now?—how discover the whereabouts of his beloved? As he thought of Ruth struggling in the arms of those foul monsters; of Jim Carruthers, so unaccountably entangled in the ravelled skein of events, a groan burst from him, that gave way to

the flame of a desperate resolve. Find Carruthers, and he would find Ruth. Find Carruthers, and the mystery of the terrible Things would be solved. He was sure of it. But—how find his former classmate?

Once more he returned to the trampled areas beneath the windows. Methodically, painstakingly, he searched the ground, foot by foot, in the gleam of the flashlight. Fruitless—all in vain. He was giving up—turning away heavy-hearted, when the swing of his hand brought an outer strip into the area of illumination. Ha! what was that?

The excited searcher pounced upon it. A crumpled dirty piece of paper. Carefully, tremblingly he smoothed it. A torn segment of a map—a map of New York State. One of those maps that are given away at filling-stations. Buck grew tense; on it was blue-pencilled a small circle. What did the circle enclose? He strained to read the name of the town. Birdkill, in the Catskills. A small village, evidently. He had never heard of it before.

A fierce exultation surged through his veins. At last—a definite clue. Evidently dropped by one of the ravishers, possibly Carruthers, it bespoke only one thing! There was the hiding-place; the focus of the evil that was invading the land!

Buck's features tightened into grim hard lines. He was going up there—alone, to combat this menace, to rescue his loved one.

AS DUSK was falling, Buck alighted at the little town of Birdkill, high in the Catskills. Through some quirk of fortune this sleepy little village had escaped the annual throng of vacation-seekers from the great city. Its ten or fifteen frame houses, its Eagle Hotel, its general store and post-office, preserved the rural atmosphere of a century ago. The whole region about partook of this atmosphere. A few well-tended farms, a concrete road or two, a cheap automobile and a good radio set in every home, these were all of modernity to be found in the vicinage.

Directed by one of the little group engaged in the nocturnal thrill of seeing the train come in, Buck found the village hotel. The accommodations offered were quite satisfactory, though primitive. In its furnishings, the room was immaculately clean. Warned by the clangor of a hand-wielded bell, Buck took a hurried wash-up in the great china bowl, and descended to "supper."

Having disposed of the heaping platters of plain but wholesome food set before him, Saunders accompanied his few fellow guests to the "piazza," and ensconced himself in one of its wooden rockers. He found himself between the village postmaster and the station agent, bachelors both. Luck favored him. The two best sources of information for miles around were his neighbors.

"First trip to Birdkill?" Postmaster Simpson essayed the first step in the investigation undergone by every newcomer. Buck expected this and had his story ready.

"Why, yes. I've been working pretty hard on some new radio patents, and decided to take a vacation. Wanted to get away from the usual summer resort, with its pesky girls and flash sports. Heard that you folks up here didn't like any of that sort of nonsense, so I came up. Looks like just what I wanted. You don't get many strangers around here, do you?"

"Nope. Two, three drummers; 'sabout all. Mostly we keep ourselves to ourselves. Queer duck came through here 'bout six months ago, though. Fellow 'bout your age, too. Got off Number Four one morning, and had the confoundest mess o' boxes put off the baggage car——"

The station agent interrupted. "Ten

big wood cases, twenty small boxes, three big trunks. They was all marked 'fragile,' too. A body'd think they was full of eggs, the way he fussed. Wanted to know if they'd be safe till next morning. 'Sif anybody wanted to touch his old boxes. They was danged heavy too. And not a crack in 'em anywhere that a body could look through."

"Didn't stop here mor'n a half-hour." Simpson took up the tale. "Hired him a flivver from Jenkins' livery stable, hauled out a map he had, then shot off up Black Mountain. Couldn't make out what he wanted up there. Nothing but woods, and the old mill. Nobody lives there. Ain't been anybody up that way since Old Man Thompson died and the mill at the falls shut down.

"He came back next day, and got him a flivver truck at Jenkins'. Smith here, and Tom Durkin's boy helped him load his boxes. But he wouldn't take any one along to help him unload. Ned Durkin told him he wouldn't charge nuthing: just wanted the ride. But the stranger cussed and swore. Said he didn't want any—any——"

"Interlopers," supplied the railroad man.

"That's the word," Simpson continued. "Didn't want any o' them. 'Spose he meant he could wrassle them cases himself. Waal, anyways, he drove off up to Black Mountain again. Brought the truck back the next day. Since then no one's seen hide nor hair o' him."

The station agent could repress himself no longer. That his brother gossip should enjoy the retailing of the most thrilling episode in the history of the town was unbearable. He burst out—abandoning his usual slow drawl for a rapidity of utterance which effectually shut Simpson off.

"Nope. Nobody's seen him. Couple of us took a walk up the mountain Sunday after he got here. Land around the falls was posted: 'Private Property. Keep off, this means you.' We didn't pay no 'tention, them signs is usually to scare hoboes. We went right on in. Hadn't gone more'n ten feet when we heard a shot. John swears he felt the bullet part his hair. You kin bet we run. The constable said a man had a right to shoot to keep trespassers off'n his land. But that gink better not come to town when John's around!"

Buck could hardly conceal his excitement. Surely this tale of the mysterious stranger confirmed the tattered map that had brought him to Birdkill. But he dared not give the gossips a hint of his suspicions. If the mysterious stranger were indeed Jim, Ruth was up there with him. Perhaps she was still unharmed. The organization of a posse, a mass attack, might precipitate whatever danger threatened her. He must move carefully.

"Certainly a strange story," he said, as indifferently as he could. "But there may be some reasonable explanation. Maybe the stranger is just some one like me, out for a rest away from people. As long as he doesn't bother you, I'd leave him alone. How's radio reception around here?"

"That's another funny thing. For about three weeks no one around here's been able to get anything but static on his set. Before that we could get New York, Schenectady, an' even distance like Chicago clear as a bell. No one kin make it out."

Another link in the chain of clues! "Well, well, you don't say! That's right in my line. I'll have to look into it while I'm up here. Well, I'm for bed. See you tomorrow!"

Once in his room, Buck threw himself across the bed. At last he was hot on the trail. He must carefully plan his course. This was no ordinary criminal with whom

he had to deal. Weird things were happening up there on Black Mountain. A scientific genius perverting his knowledge to evil ends. An unscrupulous monster was wielding a mastery of unknown forces. One misstep, and all would be lost. For himself, Buck was not perturbed. But Ruth, laughing-eyed Ruth, what of her? A groan escaped the anguished man.

This wouldn't do. He must plan calmly, thoroughly. Well, the first thing to do was to find out just what was going on up there. Only way to do that was to go and see. By Jove, he'd start right now! Buck sprang up, then stopped short. Wait a minute. Mustn't go off at half-cock. Suppose he got into trouble up there. Was shot, or captured. Who'd know all that he'd found out? Must get somebody else. Who? None of these yokels. He'd have to get Riley!

"But Riley, in spite of his brains and guts, is a policeman. He'd want to bring up a mess of police, or state troopers. Got to avoid that at all costs." Buck was thinking aloud now.

"But I can't trust any one else. I'll chance it. I think I can make him see reason. Now to get him. Can't phone or telegraph. Don't want these hicks spreading tales all over town. Wait, there's a midnight to New York, and a six o'clock back. That's it. I'll run down and be back in the morning."

FOUR o'clock. The stertorous snores of Detective Sergeant Riley shook the house. Suddenly the shrill alarm of the door-bell cut through his dreams. Instantly he was wide awake. "What the—must be a riot call. Those Reds, I guess." By this time his door was opened. "Buck Saunders, by all that's holy! Got something? Found her? Quick, man!"

"Nothing definite yet, Tim. But plenty's going to happen in the next twenty-four hours or I miss my bet. May I come in?"

"Surest thing you know. Come into the kitchen, if you don't mind. We can talk there without disturbing the family. Just a minute while I tell the missis there's nothing to get excited about. I get these early morning calls once in a while, and the old lady's always thinking I'm being called out to be murdered."

Riley was gone but a moment.

"Now spit it out, young fellow. And it'd better be good to excuse your getting me out of bed at this hour."

"It's good, all right. It's the break at last. Tim, I think I've found the headquarters of the gang we're after! I haven't got an awful lot yet, but something tells me I'm on the right trail at last."

"Come on, come on! I'm busting with curiosity now."

"Wait. Before I tell you anything I want you to promise me that you'll let me run things, or that you will forget everything I tell you."

"I thought you were assisting me. Now *you* want to be boss. That's what comes of letting a civilian in on police work."

"Listen, Tim, you know me well enough by this time to know that I wouldn't ask this unless there was good reason. Do you promise?"

"All right, all right. I'll promise."

Concisely Saunders told him the entire story. Riley listened with growing excitement.

"By Jove, that does sound like the real thing! Your clues are mighty slim, but I've got the same feeling you have. Well, we'll get the troopers and surround that place on the mountain, then go in and find out what's up!"

"No, Tim, that's just what we won't do. If I'm right, Ruth's in there. Any display of force, and Jim will take it out on her. I knew that's what you would

want to do; that's why I exacted that promise from you."

"What then?"

"I'm going in there alone. I need your help. If I lose out, somebody else must carry on. This horror must be stopped. But Ruth comes first with me! I want you to come up there alone with me, and then we'll work it out together."

"But the regulations——"

"Blast the regulations. Tim, if you're the man I think you are, you'll forget that you're an officer of the law and do what I ask. I know I'm asking you to risk your job. I'm asking more. I'm asking you to risk your life. What about it? Are you man enough to do it?"

No one with a drop of Irish blood in him could resist that challenge. Riley stretched out his huge paw.

"You win, Buck. I'm with you."

The two shook hands on that.

"Now, listen," Saunders spoke, tensely. "I'm going right back. But we can't do anything till dark, he's evidently on guard. So you leave on the six p. m. Here's the plan as far as I've gone." Saunders went on for a few moments.

"Got that? All right. I've got to go now. See you tonight."

The door closed on his retreating form.

BACK at Birdkill, Buck spent the day familiarizing himself with the scene of the coming expedition. A dirt road, meandering westward from the hamlet, passed among three or four small farms, then plunged into the darkness of a thick wood. Almost immediately it began to climb up the steep slope of Black Mountain. Now paralleling the road, now wandering far afield, a sizable stream ran rapidly on its way to the Hudson and the sea.

Having ventured past the last farm, Buck found that the road gave little sign of recent use. True, there were deep-worn ruts, but these were remnants of the days when there was a busy flour mill at the falls above. He had learned that this enterprise had been abandoned years before. All that remained, he was told, was the dilapidated structure and an almost demolished water-wheel.

Saunders' walk ended when he saw the first of the warning signs the mysterious stranger had posted. Buck had no desire to arouse his quarry's suspicions, to place him on guard. The information he had thus far obtained would be sufficient till night came to veil his movements.

The afternoon of waiting, back in Birdkill, dragged on interminably. Horrible thoughts of the weird figures attacking the countryside, of the anguish Ruth must be undergoing, crawled like maggots through Buck's brain. This idle waiting was unbearable.

At last dark fell. Eight o'clock, and Buck heard the clangor of the arriving train. Thank God that's on time! Let's see, Tim dropped off at North Valley, five minutes back. Cross-country it should take him twenty-five to get here. A quarter of an hour more, then we can get busy.

Fifteen minutes passed by. Buck, waiting impatiently at his open window, heard at last the thump-thump of the heavy-footed detective echoing in the deserted street. A dark figure paused uncertainly below.

"All right, Tim, be right down," Saunders called in a low tone. One last look at his revolver, then Buck was out in the street.

Here in the sleeping street of the little village, Tim's garb, revealed in the dim light of a half moon, was incongruous indeed. From the heavy-soled shoes of the patrolman to the brown derby perched precariously on the back of his head, the detective was redolent of the great city.

In spite of his excitement Saunders grinned broadly.

"Hello, Tim. Glad you're here at last. Let's get out on the road before we wake the hicks!"

The purlieus of the town were soon passed. The two paused.

"Well, what's the lay, Buck?"

"We're going up that mountain. The old mill is about half-way up. Then we'll see what's next."

"Say, what's the matter with the lights? Power-house break down?"

Saunders laughed. "I'm afraid they don't light their roads as well as we do on Fifth Avenue, Tim. No, we'll have to depend on old Luna up there, and our flashlights."

"Well, I suppose what's gotta gotta, but I'd sure like to see a couple of lamp posts. Got your gat?"

"Here it is."

"Throw out those cartridges and take these. I've been working at them all day."

"What on earth have you got there?"

"Silver bullets."

"Silver bullets! What's the idea?"

"Can't kill banshees with lead. That's been our trouble all along. Just remembered today what my grandfather told me. Only thing that's any good is silver bullets."

Saunders smiled covertly. The weird happenings of the past six months were arousing all the old superstitions imbedded deep in his companion's Irish nature. But it would be tactless to mock him.

"All right, if it'll make you feel any better. But let's get going."

The two walked on. Deep silence reigned beneath the trees. Only the far-off shrilling of the crickets broke the silence. It was very dark here in the woods. Barely enough moonlight filtered through the ever-arching trees to show the path. The peace of nature's night gave no hint of the dread not far off.

"Hush, what's that?" A sudden whisper came from Riley.

Ahead there was a faint humming sound, mingled with the rush of waters.

"Sounds like a dynamo," Buck said at last. "Shouldn't wonder. The disturbances of the radio sets around here speak of some electrical operations at the old mill. We'll see."

At long last Saunders spoke again. "We're almost there, Tim. I don't want to go along the road any farther. They're probably watching that. We'll get over to the creek. It's only twenty feet to the right of that dead tree. If we follow the stream it will lead us to the mill. That's safer, I think."

They plunged into the forest. A moment, and the glint of moonlight on the waters showed them the stream.

"Quiet now. Try to make no sound. We're mighty close."

Progress was more difficult now, but at last the overpowering hum told Buck and Tim they were near their goal. The adventurers were crawling now. Miraculously, no sudden crash resulted from Riley's awkward attempts at woodmanship.

Suddenly, they came to a clearing and halted. Clear in the moonlight now they could see the looming structure of the old mill. The great wheel, repaired, was turning rapidly in the stream from which a wooden flume rose up the mountainside where once the waters fell free. The air vibrated with the hum of machinery in rapid revolution. No light came from the building. Far off in the valley a church clock struck twelve.

"What now?" Tim breathed.

"Wait a few minutes, and watch. Perhaps we'll see something."

They waited. No sign of life about the place. Only the eternal turning of the wheel, the roaring of the waters, the hum of machinery.

SUDDENLY Riley gripped Buck's arm. Tremblingly he pointed to the road, where it emerged from the trees. Movement, figures could be perceived there. The shadowed forms became more distinct. Two men, their automatic movements betraying their kinship to the ghouls of the cemetery at Hopeville. Between them they bore a third. No—it was a body. The trailing arms, the lolling head, spoke unmistakably of lifelessness.

A door in the black wall of the mill opened. A sword of light cut through the darkness, illumined the road, the awesome group. No mistake now. These were indeed the same terrible figures whose apparition had seared the souls of the two who watched from the shadows. The figures entered the door. It shut. Darkness again.

The tender gentleness of the summer night was gone. An ominous horror brooded over the scene. God was shut out from this place!

"No doubt now!" Saunders muttered. "This is what we've been searching for. And Ruth—Ruth is in that devil's den!" A sob burst from him.

"Hush, boy. Don't lose your head now. You've done great work so far. Pull yourself together. Look!"

Again the door had opened. In the yellow light which streamed forth, one, two, three of the dread figures appeared. They stood there uncertainly for a moment. One reeled backward, as if drawn by some irresistible force. The others ran out, swiftly, but still with that queerly mechanical gait. They disappeared among the trees.

Another form appeared in the oblong of light. More human this. He peered out into the night. Then, with a gesture of despair he vanished within. The door shut.

Saunders could scarcely contain himself for excitement. "That's Carruthers, that's Jim Carruthers. Tim, I've *got* to get in there!"

"Softly, lad, softly. How are you going to do it? There isn't an opening in that place as far as I can see. Only that door, and that's sure to be well guarded. Better let me get the troopers and we'll smash in."

"No, a thousand times no! Can't you get it in your head that Ruth's in there? We can't risk it. I tell you, I'm going in. There must be some way. Perhaps on the other side of the mill. You stay here and wait. I'll prospect around. If I'm not back in an hour, go ahead with your plan. But don't follow me in unless you get help. If these ghouls get the two of us, it'll be all over."

"Well, I've promised. So go ahead. But for God's sake take care of yourself, boy!"

"Now remember. Do nothing for an hour. If I'm not back by then, you're released from your promise."

"Good luck, Buck."

SLOWLY, carefully, silently, Saunders crept to the base of the House of Horrors. Inch by inch he dragged himself along till he had turned the corner. Ah, there was a vertical slit of light! A door? A window? Perhaps only a crack. But at the very least he could peer into this lair of evil.

Even more painstakingly slow were his movements now. Only the faint scrape of his clothing against the side of the mill marked his progress. At last he had inched his way to the beckoning streak of light.

Only a forgotten crack between two planks! Carefully Buck raised himself till he could look within.

A gasp of horror escaped him.

On a long metal slab, hung by chains of insulators from the ceiling, lay the naked body of a dead man. The glassy eyes.

the gray pallor, the limpness of every limb left no doubt that the soul had departed from that form. The breast was still.

Suspended above the slab was a spiral copper coil, beneath, another. From one to the other, through the body, a cylinder of blue flame seemed to flow. It vibrated with a blinding glare. A strong scent of ozone came to the watcher's nostrils. He heard the roaring crackle of the electric arc.

Buck could see little else of the room. Yes. Just within the field of his vision the edge of a large switchboard. A hand, grasping the knob of a rheostat, the pointer slowly moving.

Horrible enough was this scene, but more terrible what followed; for even as Saunders watched, *the dead body moved.* The fingers of the left hand, hanging flaccid over the edge of the slab, clenched. A leg was drawn up, jerkily. The head turned from side to side. The cylindrical arc grew more intense. Its roar was deafening.

The whole form was now instinct with movement. It shuddered as if in agony. Wave after wave of tremor passed over it. A horrible grin distorted its features. *It sat up!*

The pointer of the rheostat moved back. The blue flame lessened.

The form swung its legs from the slab. It rose, but stood motionless. The arc was gone, but a beam of green light from the direction of the partly seen switchboard gave it a spectral hue. The green light grew in intensity. The figure walked, with the hideous mechanical movements already so dreadfully familiar. The dead was alive!

But no. The unseeing eyes still stared glassily, unblinkingly. Eyes of a dead man, no returning soul looked forth from them. This was not a being wrested from Nirvana. This was still a dead body, invested with a gruesome semblance of life by some obscene force!

As the full horror of what he witnessed crashed into Buck's consciousness, he felt himself seized from behind. Cold, clammy cold, fingers encircled his throat. Bony legs clamped themselves about his. He was borne backward to the ground. The fingers pressed tighter. He could not breathe. He tore at the dead hands gripping him, strove desperately to free himself. But the Thing attacking him had superhuman strength. Buck labored for breath. Those fingers pressed even tighter. His lungs were bursting, an iron band constricted his forehead, great globes of light appeared and burst in his brain. He knew no more.

Endless intersecting circles of colored light danced through the blackness of space. Whirling, ever whirling, they reeled dizzily about. Two eyes, two great dead eyes stare unblinkingly, one green, one blue. The bed is hard, very hard. His head hurts so! Buck awoke.

A candle sputtered beside him. He was lying on the floor of a cave. A dark, black cave. Water dripped unceasingly from the roof. How did he get here?

He remembered. Shudder after shudder shook his throbbing body. This was a nightmare, all the dread events of the past weeks. Oh why *couldn't* he awaken?

No, it was real, too real. He was a captive. At the mercy of the fiend incarnate who had loosed the horrors of Hell on the world. And Ruth, he could never save her now!

How his throat hurt, and his head! Could he escape? He was alone, perhaps unobserved. He sat up. Eagerly he looked about. There was the entrance. A great stone blocked it.

Buck rose. He staggered. He was weak, very weak. But his strength was returning rapidly. He made his way, painfully, to the hole which marked the exit

from his rocky prison. With all the force he could muster he tried to move the barrier. To no avail. Even were he in full command of his not inconsiderable strength, this would be an impossible task. He slumped to the floor again, bowed his head on his knees, and groaned in his despair. Fatigue swept over him like a flood. He slept.

Again Saunders awoke. Some one was in the cave! He opened his eyes. Jim! Jim Carruthers stood there, gazing down at him, smiling sardonically. A gleaming revolver was held menacingly in his hand.

"Hello, Buck," a mocking tone belied the welcoming words; "glad you've dropped in for a little visit. Haven't seen you for ages."

BUCK sprang to his feet, made as if to leap for Carruthers. An ominous motion of the weapon halted him.

"What have you done with Ruth? You fiend, you devil!" a stream of vituperation came from Saunders' lips. All his pent-up agony, all his despair, all his helplessness, came forth in lurid denunciation. "If you've laid a finger on her I'll tear you limb from limb, and all your devil's tricks won't save you!"

"Why, Buck, your language astonishes me. Surely that's not the way to talk to an old friend. As for Ruth, she's safe. A little uncomfortable, perhaps, but that can't be helped. You're just in time to wish us joy, for she has graciously consented to marry me."

"You lie, you monster! She'd never marry you. Not while I live!"

"Oh, if that's the only obstacle, it will be removed very soon. You don't think I'm letting you go back with all that you've found out. You'd be dead now if I hadn't wanted to talk with you first. I've got a lot of pride in my achievements, and it will tickle me to explain them to some one who can appreciate their greatness. I can tell you my secrets freely—you'll never repeat them. I can use that splendid body of yours too. You've really done me a favor by walking in here. Thanks, old man!

"A little while ago you were trying hard to get out of this cave. Good thing for you, you failed. Come take a look at my pets."

Carruthers turned. In his free hand was an electric torch. Its beam sprang out and illumined the cave's entrance. The stone was gone; the opening gaped, black, menacing. Saunders, still trembling with rage, moved to it, his captor close behind him.

The sound of many people came to his ears. A fetid stench assailed his nostrils. Something dreadful was out there! Suddenly, the beam from Carruthers' flashlight sprang out again. It flashed here and there about the huge cavern the light revealed. Hundreds upon hundreds, nay, thousands of the dead-alive were moving about in the darkness. The natural cavity stretched out beyond his vision, yet so great was that throng that each could move freely for only three paces. Here in the bowels of the earth a veritable sea of dull gray faces, lusterless eyes. When this horde was let loose, what terror would stalk the earth!

"Nice fellows, these creations of mine," Carruthers gloated. "When I've perfected my process, they'll be harmless enough. But now, you've come into contact with one or two of them already. I don't think you relished the experience. What do you think would happen if you should walk out there?"

Saunders turned pale at the thought.

"I had that stone put there to protect you, not to keep you in. Now, you've been very curious about my proceedings. Let's get back in the cave and I'll tell you all about it. Won't do you much good, but I've got to talk to somebody. Ruth

doesn't know enough about science to understand the greatness of my achievement. And I have nobody else, but those." A wave of his hand indicated the Things in the outer cavern. "Well, will you listen?"

Buck, striving hard to maintain his equanimity, shrugged his shoulders. "I don't suppose I can help myself."

The two went back into the small cave. The candle sputtered. Black shadows loomed menacingly on wall and roof. From without came the unceasing murmur of the foul creations. Then began the weirdest tale ever told.

"When we were at college together, you fellows called me 'the grind'. While you were booting the skin of a dead hog about, or engaging in other invigorating but useless sports, I busied myself in laboratory or library. You were having a good time, I was preparing for life. Now, while the rest of you are out selling bonds to your friends, I am on the way to control a means of cheap labor that will set the world free from toil. One more problem to solve, only one more, and I shall be ready to announce my accomplishment to the world.

"The most expensive item in industry is the cost of labor, and its unreliability. From the smallest farm to the greatest factory this is true. The greatest geniuses of our times have devoted their ingenuity to the devising of metal machines to replace human labor. In the meantime the best, the most ingenious, the most adaptable of machines has been wastefully discarded—the human body. By the millions, by the tens of millions we cast this perfect machine into the earth to molder and decay, while we spend millions to produce devices not half as efficient." His tone had become didactic. He was a scientist, lecturing to his class.

"This error I set out to rectify. All that was needed was a means to revivify the human body after the vital principle, the so-called soul, had departed. I knew that this very revivification would halt the process of decay.

"Long years of work, of hope aroused, of terrible disappointment. At last I solved the secret. Here is how I did it.*

"As I have already mentioned, I have only one more problem to solve. It has been necessary for me to use fresh bodies, in which the processes of decay have not yet commenced. Inexplicably, some remnant of volition seems to linger in the nervous systems. Every now and then one of my subjects rebels, throws off the influence of my control devices and strikes out for himself. The result has been the series of so-called outrages which have aroused the community. Of course I regret these. But incidents such as these are the inevitable accompaniment of scientific progress."

Buck's soul revolted in protest at this callous reference to the horrors which had struck terror into the countryside. "The man is mad!" was his first thought. But no, those were not a madman's eyes. This was merely the cold calculation of the scientist, brushing aside as insignificant everything but matters essential to his work.

"My principal perturbation," Carruthers went on, "over these happenings was that they might lead investigation to this place. But, luckily, thus far my subjects have broken out only when at a distance. Evidently the power of my control beams is weakened by intervening space. Tonight, for the first time, two subjects re-

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*That no attempt to reproduce Carruthers' process may be made, his exposition of it has been expunged from the narrative. Suffice it to say that the misguided genius obtained his startling results by a development of the well-known phenomenon of galvanization combined with an ingenious adaptation of sinusoidal electric currents of extremely high voltage, but minute amperage. Remote control was maintained by the beam projection of short wave vibrations. A detailed description of the process, together with blueprints of the necessary apparatus, have been deposited in the secret archives of the War Department, to be utilized only in a national emergency of the most desperate nature.—THE AUTHORS.

volted in my very laboratory, and ran out into the woods.

"When I shall have solved this last problem, I shall publish my results. Then I shall be prepared to rent out to farmers and to industry laborers who will not tire, require no food, demand no wages. Can you realize what a Utopia the world will become when this happens?"

"Utopia—a veritable Hell, you mean!" The amazed listener could no longer contain himself.

"Ah, there speaks the primitive, the worshipper of the human body. I suppose I shall have to contend with a lot of that sort of sentimental drivel. But when the benefits of my great scheme shall be realized, that sort of prating will be forgotten.

"That cavern out there is my warehouse. The old mill is my factory, my raw material comes from the cemeteries of the world. You are witnessing the birth of a new industry."

Saunders was trembling now with rage. The man's coldly callous attitude toward the unspeakable thing he was doing sent his hot blood into a boil. If he could but catch this fiend unawares, get his hands about that throat! He would risk it. But no, that menacing horde out there. Ruth at the mercy of those monsters, called from the grave! Craft might accomplish what force could not.

"Truly a great plan," he said, as calmly as he could, "but of course it takes a little while to get used to the idea. But I can't understand why you brought Ruth here. What have you in mind?"

"This work of mine will take years. I must have a son to carry it on. Long ago I selected Ruth as my fit mate. My brain, her marvelous body—what a combination that will make! She could not understand. She preferred you, a brainless playboy. So I took her, as I take the bodies I need in my work. She still fights me off, still dreams that you will rescue her. When I show her your dead body she will give up that foolish hope, and yield to me. Meantime, she is locked in the old office of the mill, as comfortable as she will let me make her.

"As for you, you have served your purpose now. I needed some partly intelligent individual to tell my story to. Now I shall rid myself of your impudent interference in my plans. In a little while you shall be dead. And I shall have another unit to store in my warehouse yonder."

"You're very pleasant."

"Pleasant or no, that's my last word. Don't fear, your death will be an easy one. I want an absolutely uninjured corpse for a test I have in mind. Don't try to go out. Only I, and their own kind, can pass safely through that cavern. Good-bye."

A mocking gesture of the revolver in his hand, and Carruthers was gone.

"MY GOD! What hope have I now?" Buck was talking aloud in his horror and despair. "That cold scientific machine will carry out his threats. Only a miracle can save me. Perhaps, perhaps God will help me. No one else can."

Encompassed by such dread things as his reeling brain could only partly conceive, Buck reverted to the simple faith of his childhood. He knelt there on the damp rock, covered his eyes with his hands, and sent his soul out into the infinite in prayer.

A sound startled him. He looked up.

Bending over a tank of gas in the corner was one of the dead-alive. That was to be the manner of his demise. Poison gas. The gray hand closed about the valve, the form straightened.

A shriek burst from Saunders. *"Father!"*

By some strange twirling of the Wheel of Chance it was the body of his own father that was to take the agonized lad's life. What climactic irony had brought this to pass?

*"Father!"* Again the agonized shriek burst forth. *"It's I. Hartley! Your son! Don't! Don't turn on the gas! Father!"*

What is this? A gleam as of some dim intelligence lights the lack-luster eyes. The hand drops from the valve. The pale features work convulsively. Two arms go out, as in entreaty. The form drops to the ground. Is still!

By some strange alchemy of nature, the revivified body of Buck's parent had felt the call of its own. Kinship had broken the strength of the weird power which had held this poor corpse in its thrall. The crowning crime had defeated its own ends. The miracle for which Buck had prayed had come to pass! For the present, at least, he was saved.

Trembling, exhausted by the ordeal, Buck lay on the hard rock. He could not mourn the father whose body lay so close; rather he was glad that that body was at last at rest. His thoughts turned again to the dear girl whose agonized cry for help had brought him here.

"How to get through that cavern, through that mob of dreadful Things? How to get to the mill and Ruth? I must think, think fast. Wait a moment. What was that he said? 'Only I, and *their own kind,* can pass safely through that cavern!' Perhaps, perhaps I can simulate them, fool them. It's a terrible chance, but I must take it."

Saunders went to the mouth of his cave and peered cautiously out. Day must have come. Far off he could see a faint glimmer of daylight. A faint illumination dimly lit the crowd of dead-alive, seething with the noise of many waters. He shuddered.

Back in the cave again, he practised for a moment the flaccid posture, the mechanical walk, of Carruthers' slaves. Then, gathering his courage with tremendous effort, he ventured forth.

Would the subterfuge work? Would he succeed in working his way to that distant light? Or were these dread Things waiting till retreat was impossible before they leaped on him? The tension was terrific. Hands of iron constricted his heart. Cold beads of moisture stood out on his brow. Why not try a desperate dash? No. Before he could run ten paces these gray forms would be upon him, would overwhelm him, rend him, screaming, into little bits. He forced himself to down that nigh irresistible impulse, to jerk slowly forward in the very gait of the dead-alive.

Years passed, it seemed. Ever nearer grew that patch of light. Ever tenser the shuddering fear of the horrors about him. Once a cold hand brushed his. He stood stock-still. The hair at the base of his neck bristled in ancestral fear. But the form passed on.

At last he reached the threshold of the door from which the light came—passed over it—fell fainting on the floor. He was through!

A MOMENT Buck lay, his senses reeling with unutterable relief. Then he pulled himself together. His task was but half accomplished. He looked about him.

He was evidently in the basement of the old mill, the walls were foundation stones. High up on one side a window gave entrance to the blessed sunshine. At the end was a rickety staircase. From somewhere above came the familiar hum of machinery.

"Locked in the old mill office. That's where he said she was. Well, that's

somewhere above. Perhaps near the head of those stairs. Here goes."

Testing each step, Buck silently crept upward—to what new horrors? Scarcely a creak of the old wood gave token of his passage. At last he reached the top, pressed cautiously on the trap-door there. It gave at his touch; thanks be it was not barred. Slowly, slowly, he raised it, listening intently the while. No sound came to alarm him. Now the opening was large enough to admit his head. He peered about.

Directly ahead of him was a door. Old and faded, he could still decipher the letters, "Office." So near was his goal! And the key was in the door! Again he listened. Only the hum of the generators somewhere behind.

Even more cautiously than before he raised the trap a little. He could squeeze through the opening now. At last, he was through. Softly he crept to the office door, reached up, slowly turned that providential key. Slowly, slowly he turned the knob, pushed open the door, slid into the room, closed the opening behind. Then only he dared to breathe, to look about.

The room was dark, the one window boarded. But through a chink in the boarding one only beam of light streamed through the dusty air. Buck's eye followed it. See, the ray rests on a face, a well-remembered face. Ruth lies sleeping there!

Saunders tiptoed lightly to the rude bed on which his sweetheart lay. Gently he pressed his palm against those sweet lips, swiftly bent and kissed her brow. The eyes flew open, stared in fright, then lit up with unutterable gladness.

"Quiet, dear. Not a sound!" Buck whispered, then removed his silencing hand.

"Buck, dear, at last you've come. Thank God, thank God! Oh take me out of this terrible place. Kiss me, and take me away."

Two forms locked in close embrace, their danger forgotten in the bliss of reunion.

Gently Saunders disengaged himself. "Are you all right, dear?" he whispered. "Am I in time?"

"Yes, he has been gentle enough. But take me away. Quickly, dear, quickly!"

"Only a moment now, dear heart, and I'll have you out of here. That window——"

"Not so fast, not so fast!" a suave voice came like the crack of doom. Buck whirled about.

There in the doorway stood Carruthers, revolver in hand, a grim scowl on his face.

"I see my plans have slipped again. What happened?"

"None of your business, you devil!" Saunders snapped.

"Well, no matter. But you didn't think you could get away with it, did you? Luckily, after those two subjects got away last night I rigged an electric eye* across this doorway, to warn me if one of them should try to enter this room. Forgot the key, though. The alarm rang just now and I hurried down. Didn't expect to find *you* here.

"And now, young man, I'll settle you myself. So say good-bye to my future wife. When I count ten I'll shoot. One —two—thr—what's that!"

A tremendous crash had sounded from without. Carruthers, startled, turned toward it. Before he could look back, Saunders had leaped across the floor, seized the revolver with one hand and its

*A contrivance consisting of a photo-electric cell actuated by a beam of light. The momentary interruption of the beam by an object passing through it causes a change in the resistance of the cell to a current passing through it, which change, through a system of relays, may be utilized to actuate any electrical device, in this case an alarm. First utilized in 1930, this invention is now extensively used.—THE AUTHORS.

owner's throat with the other, and a fierce struggle was begun.

Crash, crash, crash. A gust of cold air blew in. Somewhere a door had given way. "Buck, Buck, are you here?" Riley's voice came in a great shout. "Buck!"

"Here, Riley, this way!" Saunders, for the moment in the ascendant, managed to shout.

The thumping of many feet came from across the mill floor. Into the room first Riley, behind him four men in green uniform, revolvers in one hand, axes in the other. Quickly they dragged the combatants apart, subdued and handcuffed the cursing Carruthers.

"Thank God you got here just in time!" Buck, disheveled, bleeding, gasped. "I've never been so glad to see anybody. Another few seconds and you'd have been too late."

"Are you all right, boy? Sure?"

"O. K., Riley. And here's Ruth, unharmed too!"

"That's great! I'd made up my mind I'd never see either of you alive again. I waited that hour, heard a scuffle once, but obeyed orders and stayed where I was. When time was up I scouted around, couldn't see any trace of you, then tore off for help. I ran down that road, ran till my lungs were fair bursting. I'd arranged to have these boys wait just the other side of Birdkill. They had a car, but half-way up the mountain, she went dead. We ran the rest of the way, just got here. Didn't stop to ask permission, but just crashed through the door with our axes."

"Best thing you ever did in your life. Now let's get busy. Somewhere around are the foul contraptions invented by this man. Get your axes and we'll smash them."

"Wait." For the first time the prisoner spoke. "I'm licked, I see. They're all gone, my dreams. You win, Saunders. The world's not ready for me yet. But, if I can't do the good I aimed at, I don't want to do more harm. Out in the country roundabout are thousands of my subjects, hidden away. If the power is cut off suddenly they'll drop and rot where they are, in cellars, hotel rooms, hidden caves. Disease will spread from their decaying carcasses. You must get them back here."

"You're not trying more tricks, are you?" the detective questioned.

"No. I swear by Science, my holiest thing. I'm licked and I know it. Take me to the switchboard and I'll tell you what to do."

"I believe him, Tim," Buck interposed. "Do what he says. Ruth, you stay here and lock the door."

"No, my dear. I can not stay here alone any longer. Don't leave me!"

"Then come with us."

The odd procession moved to the room first seen by Buck. A mass of electrical machinery filled the room.

"All right, Carruthers, tell us what to do. And God help you if you try to put over anything." Riley grimly twirled his automatic.

"Throw the third switch in the top row. That will call them all back."

Saunders grasped the handle of the massive switch, and sent it home.

ALL over the neighboring states weird figures appeared. From cellars, and hovels, from caves and deserted farmhouses they came. The pallor of the grave was on their faces, their arms swung flaccid by their sides. Unseeing, their lusterless eyes were turned toward Black Mountain. Thousands upon thousands they marched with their stiff mechanical step through the highways and the streets, hurrying to their long-denied rest.

The people looked out on the strange spectacle and shrank back affrighted. There was something about these strange, hastening figures which forbade interference. Not all the people, though. Here and there some one recognized a brother, a parent, a child, buried months before. These ran out into the streets and the roads and strove to stay the onrushing figures. They wept and implored their lost loved ones to remain. But the forms never halted in their swift march. On and on, toward the summoning hum of the dynamos in the old mill.

And now the road up the mountain was filled with the strange procession, the whole mountainside covered with them. Swift they came to the door from which they had issued forth. In a never-ending stream they poured down the staircase and into the dark cavern. All day the group in the mill watched Carruthers' creation rushing home, till at last the stream dwindled, and the last few stragglers had disappeared in the depths.

Then, at last, the switch was pulled that let the current through Blake's strange devices, and the hum was stilled. Dynamite then, brought during the day by one of the troopers, was placed about, and the fuses lighted. The little group rushed far away, then paused and looked back. A thunderous crash, a blinding flare. Gone was the mill and the madness it hid, sealed forever the cavern of horror.

Riley turned to his prisoner. "Come on now—what's this?" The man was white, a green froth bubbled from his lips.

"I've fooled you at last," a weak voice gasped. "You'll never jail me." A dead form hung from the cuffs that joined it to the troopers on either side.

" 'Tis better so."

BIRDKILL is no longer a sleepy mountain village. A great hotel rises there, where rest the hundreds of mourners who come each day to visit the grave of the thousands whose cenotaph Black Mountain is. A tall white shaft is rising on the summit, common monument to those whose bodies were ravished from their former resting-places.

In a little house on Long Island, Ruth and Hartley Saunders strive to forget those weeks of horror. Mainly they succeed, but now and then, at midnight, Ruth screams in her sleep, and Buck wakes, and comforts her.

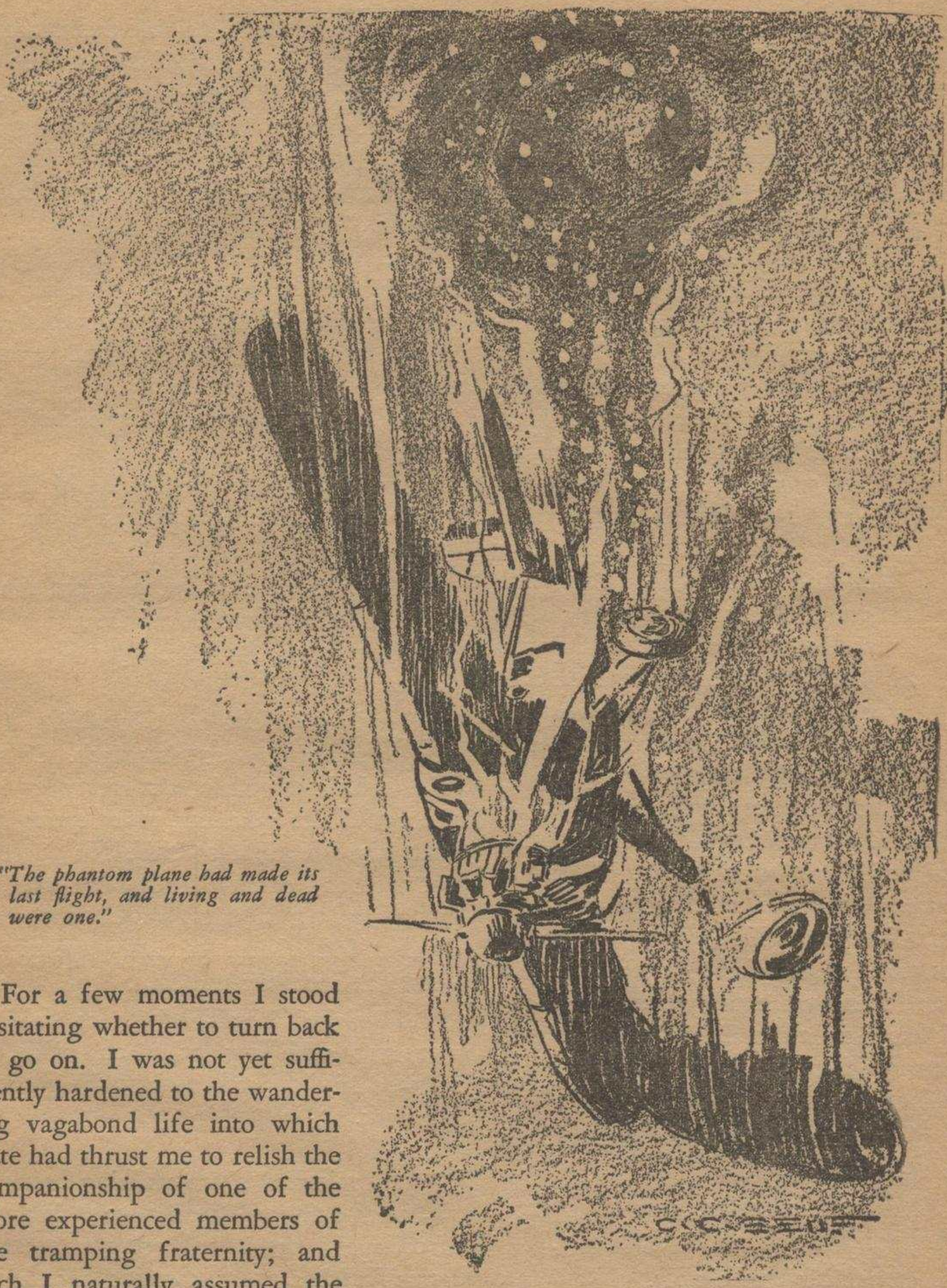
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# The Phantom Flight

## *By* ARLTON EADIE

*The surgeon's hand shook, with disastrous results—a vivid and pathetic tale about a fatal airplane flight*

IT WAS on the Folkestone-Dover road, a few miles beyond the ancient cathedral city of Canterbury, that I first met the man who called himself John Delaney. The encounter was of his own seeking, for, as I trudged wearily along, my head bent against the chill wind that was sweeping in from the sea, I entirely failed to notice his crouching figure amid the bracken of the little wayside thicket, until his shrill whistle caused me to glance round.



*"The phantom plane had made its last flight, and living and dead were one."*

For a few moments I stood hesitating whether to turn back or go on. I was not yet sufficiently hardened to the wandering vagabond life into which Fate had thrust me to relish the companionship of one of the more experienced members of the tramping fraternity; and such I naturally assumed the man to be. Yet, as I stood regarding him, I was gradually conscious of a subtle difference between him and the homeless outcasts whom I had hitherto met. It was certainly not his clothes which gave me that impression, for they were even more ragged than my own; moreover, his face was unwashed, his hair long and unkempt, while a beard of several weeks' growth covered his chin. But there was a look of refinement about his features which the overlying grime failed entirely to conceal, and

when he spoke his voice was that of an educated man.

"Whither away so fast, brother?" he cried, lifting his battered hat with the travesty of a ceremonious bow. "Are you hastening to the bedside of a rich uncle with a reminder of the fat legacy he has promised you? Or is it the less ambitious hope of securing accommodation in the nearest casual ward that quickens your footsteps?"

High-flown and bantering though the greeting seemed, it was uttered with an air of such infectious, daredevil gayety that I found myself smiling in response.

"With regard to the first part of your kind inquiry," I said, adopting his own tone, "I'm sorry to say that all my rich relations are at the moment such distant ones as to be far below the financial horizon. And up to now I've been able to get along without seeking the hospitality of a casual ward. I prefer to trust to luck for my board and lodging."

"In that case your supper is likely to be light, and your bedroom devilishly well-ventilated!" laughed the man. "Still, I'm prepared to agree with you—up to a point. Sleeping with the grass for a mattress and the stars for your nightlights is no bad thing when the weather is as hot as it has been lately. But how about when it pours with rain—as it's likely to tonight if this wind holds?"

I glanced at the lowering sky, and felt less assured.

"One can find some sort of shelter, somewhere," I said rather dubiously.

He shook his head slowly.

"Speaking from painful experience, I can assure you that sometimes one can't!" he said grimly. "Farmers don't look kindly on tramps, and they have a nasty habit of leaving their watch-dogs roaming loose at night. However, as it happens, I know of a splendid place where we can spend the night—all the comforts of a home without any of the expense or responsibility. It's only a couple of miles or so from here—I was only waiting till it got dark to take possession. Be my guest for tonight—there's plenty of room to spare!"

The prospect of having my night's shelter thus provided for gave me no little satisfaction; yet there was something in the manner of the unknown tramp that made me vaguely uneasy.

"What is this place you speak of?" I asked suddenly.

He rose to his feet and swept his hand toward the darkening countryside that lay seaward.

"The deserted aerodrome on the chalk downs overlooking the sea," he said, with a strange laugh. "I'll show you the way. Come!"

I made no move to follow him, but stood pondering over his words. Something within my brain, a mere vague instinct of coming disaster, urged me to decline his offer and to shift for myself. But even as I opened my lips to refuse, a sudden spatter of raindrops came on the dying wind. Most certainly the night would be both wet and cold.

"All right," I said briefly, as, falling into step with my unknown guide, I suffered him to lead me into the gathering dusk.

TEN minutes' sharp walking brought us to a tiny village, a mere sprinkling of cottages—mostly belonging to poultry farms—with a square-towered church on one side of the road and a small ale-house on the other. At the door of this latter my companion came to an unexpected halt.

"I'm good for a couple of pints," he said, jingling some coins in his trousers pocket. "Let's drink to our better ac-

quaintance; that is"—he added as I demurred—"if you're not too proud."

Embarrassed as I was by the offer, I could not help admiring the clever manner in which he made a refusal almost impossible.

"Since you put it that way," I returned with a shrug, "I shall be happy to join you. It's certainly good of you to ask me."

"Not at all," he laughed, pushing open the door of the public bar. "Are we not *Arcades ambo*—fellow-travelers in Arcady—brethren of the broad highway?"

There were two groups of men—farm laborers, apparently, by their clothes—in the little low-pitched room as we entered; some gathered round the counter, the rest interested in a dartboard at the farther end. Many curious glances were cast in our direction as we took our seats on an old-fashioned oak settle and proceeded to consume our modest refreshment. It was clear that they recognized us for the homeless tramps we were, and the opportunity for the display of a little rustic wit was too good to be missed.

"I've often wunnered wot becum o' the two old scarecrows as used to be in Threeacre Field," said one joker, with a wink and a grin. "But I knaws naw!"

There was a series of loud guffaws at this exquisite sally, and when they had subsided another spoke:

"Better lock the doors o' yer roosts to-night, mates, or mebbe we'll find the scarecrows 'ave skeered away a few o' our chickens!"

My companion must have seen the look which mounted to my face, for he plucked my sleeve as I was about to rise.

"Sit down and take no notice," he whispered. "We should stand no chance in a rough-and-tumble scrap. Best say nothing."

That his advice was sensible was proved a few seconds later, for the men at the bar soon forgot our presence and resumed a discussion which, it would seem, our entrance had interrupted.

"I says it afore and I'll say it agin—those fools up at Eastley dunno wot they're talking about," said a man with a very red face. "I says 'taint nat'ral for such a place to be harnted."

"Why not?" asked one of his companions.

The red-faced man took a long draft from his pewter pot and shook his head wisely.

"'Taint nat'ral, nohow," he declared with even greater vigor than before. "I can un'erstand ghosts and such-like a-harnting graveyards, or ruinated castles, or a 'ouse where a murder had been done years and years agone. But when folks tell o' harntings going on in a nearly brand-new place like that theer hairydrome—well, I don't believe a word o' it, and that's flat!"

I had been listening to the talk in a desultory manner, but as he uttered the word "hairydrome" I was conscious of a suddenly stimulated interest. Was it possible that the fool was alluding to the deserted aerodrome where we purposed to spend the night?

"Anyway, there be plenty o' folk up at Eastley as have seed it," declared the man they called Garge.

"Seed wot?" demanded the skeptic with the red face.

"Seed the whole place lit up like a theayter in the dead o' night, with lights in every window——"

"Lights?" interrupted the other in a tone of withering contempt. "Wot siggerfies a few lights? You said place were harnted, and now you says 'lights'. Lights baint ghosts, nohow."

"Who said they were?" retorted his friend.

"Any fool could make lights; mebbe it weer a tramp or two as got into the old place for a doss. I see wot is it, Garge," he went on, regarding the other with drunken gravity as he slowly shook his head. "You've been the victim o' wot they calls a hallucillumination. You seed somebody a-lighting of his pipe, and you thought it weer a ghost. Lights ain't ghosts, nohow."

"I never said as how *I* saw it——" began the indignant Garge.

"Lights ain't ghosts, nohow, and all the argyment in the world won't make 'em so."

"Look 'ere——"

"Lights ain't ghosts——"

"You dunno wot you're talking about," said Garge, triumphantly clinching the argument. "You be drunk."

"Me?" shouted the red-faced man in a tone of indignant repudiation. "Just coom outside, and I'll show 'ee if I be drunk! It's you as be drunk, Garge Withers, with yer lights and ghosts. For two pins I'd knock yer silly 'ead off!"

At this point the red-faced man made a sudden dash toward the rash critic of his sobriety and hit him accurately on the nose. The next instant the little room was filled with struggling men. We did not wait to see the result of this novel trial by battle of the material against the supernatural, but quietly finished our drinks and came away. The last thing I heard as we passed through the village was the voice of the red-faced man triumphantly raised above the uproar as he proclaimed to the world at large:

"Lights baint ghosts, nohow!"

INSTEAD of continuing on the main road, my companion struck off into a steep and narrow lane running by the side of the church. For the greater part of a mile the lane led steadily uphill, turning and twisting after the manner of its kind, and when we gained the brow of the chalk ridge the full force of the rain-laden wind met us with all its fury. Here, for the first time, I caught sight of the steadily winking light which marked the entrance to Folkestone Harbor; to the west shone the more distant gleam from Dover.

As we paused to regain our breath after the stiff climb, my companion spoke for the first time since quitting the inn.

"Queer yarn that fellow has got hold of," he commented thoughtfully.

"You mean about the haunted aerodrome?"

He nodded and turned to resume his journey.

"Strangely enough, I've heard some rumors before about the same thing," he told me as we tramped along the muddy road. "Of course there's no truth in the tale, but it's curious how these things start."

This gave me an opportunity of putting into words the thought that had been simmering in my brain for the past hour.

"Is this reputedly haunted aerodrome the place where you intend to spend the night?"

"Yes." He peered through the darkness into my face as he added with a laugh, "Why, you're not scared, are you?"

"Of course not," I hastened to say. "Still, I should be glad to have some idea where we're bound for."

"There is not far to go now; if it wasn't so dark we could see the place from here."

"Is it a derelict Air Force depot?" I asked curiously.

"No. It was built by a private aviation company which came into existence since the war. The promoters hoped to do great things, and when the company was formed any amount of influential people put their money into it. At first everything went well; they had the finest and

most up-to-date machines; they secured the first air-mail contract to the Continent that was ever granted to a private company; in short, it seemed as if the speculators who had come in on the ground floor were well on the way to making their fortunes. Then came a streak of the vilest bad luck. Three bad crashes followed each other in the course of as many weeks. There was no question of foul play, or anything like that; it was just bad luck, and nothing else. One machine struck a tree in the fog; another came down in the Channel; the third crashed in flames within a few miles of the spot where we stand—and there was a heavy death-roll on each occasion—the last was the worst, for not a soul was saved. It was that disaster that broke the company for good."

As he spoke the words, something in his tone arrested my attention. There was a note of bitterness which seemed strange in one recounting the tale of an accident in which he had no particular concern.

"You appear to know this company very well," I remarked on a sudden impulse.

He uttered a short bark of a laugh.

"Yes, I know it!" Then he added, in a voice so low and indistinct that he might have been muttering to himself: "My God! I guess I know it all right!"

For a long time after that we strode on in silence. Although my curiosity had been provoked by his words, there was something about the man which made me refrain from questioning him. I found myself wondering if he had been ruined by putting his money into the unlucky aviation company; or if he were the pilot who was in charge when one of the disasters occurred. But presently the object of my speculations brought them to an end by referring to the matter of his own accord.

"It was only by the merest fluke that I was not on board the Paris air-mail when it came down in flames that night."

"Is that so?" I cried in surprize. "Then you were indeed fortunate."

"Fortunate?" He repeated the word in a voice that made me stare. "Fortunate, you say? Well, as to that, you shall judge for yourself. . . ."

He began to speak in a dull, listless voice as we battled our way across the dark wind-swept moor. And this is the story he told:

"HAVING regard for the position in which you now see me, it may require some little effort for you to believe me when I say that two years after the war came to an end I was looked upon as one of the most brilliant surgeons in London. I was still young, it is true, but in those days one gained a lot of experience in a short space of time. When I resigned my commission and took over my father's extensive West End practise, I came straight from a sphere of action where lightning diagnosis and the fearless adoption of novel methods were matters of daily—occasionally hourly—necessity. For, needless to say, there is no time for leisurely consultations in a first-dressing-station when a big push is on.

"Plodding practitioners looked upon me with envy, and with good reason. Whilst still far short of middle age, I had reached a position which many a man has striven for in vain for a whole lifetime. I was famous, honored, with far more money than I needed, and to crown all I had won the love of the most adorable girl in all the world. The day that I married Irene I felt that the cup of my happiness was filled to the brim. True—it was! But it was soon to be dashed from my lips, before I could quaff a single drop of its satisfying draft.

"Considering my position, the wedding was a fairly quiet affair. We had arranged to spend a few days of our honeymoon in Paris, on the way to our real destination, which was Switzerland, and it was more for the novelty of the experience than for any desire to save time that Irene begged me to cross to the French capital by air. At first I was reluctant to agree. Of late Dame Fortune had been so lavish with her gifts to me that I had a vague and—as it seemed to me at the time—a foolishly unreasonable dread that the smiles of the fickle goddess would give place to frowns. Still it was the very first thing that Irene had asked of me, and she seemed so disappointed and hurt at my refusal that at last I gave way. After the usual reception, we slipped away and drove down through Kent by car, timing our arrival at the aerodrome a few minutes before the Paris mail was due to take off.

"I shall always treasure the memory of that drive down; it was our first journey together as man and wife—and it was destined to be our last! The purple-gray dusk of evening merged into night as we sped along the quiet roads, through busy towns and past sleepy villages where the cheery beams of lamplight shone beneath the thatched eaves; through somber woods and bush-grown lanes, across open moors lying stark and bare beneath the jeweled immensity of the night. . . .

"Well, we got to the aerodrome in good time. The great triple-engined plane had already been taken out of its hangar, and stood, ready to start, on the stretch of level ground. Some of the passengers had taken their seats in the brilliantly illuminated saloon; others were chatting gayly to friends who had come down to see them off. The pilot, a weird figure in his leather flying-suit and goggles, was standing by the mechanic as he tested one of the engines, and at intervals the intermittent roar of its tractor filled the air.

"I assisted Irene into the cabin, and was about to enter myself, when I felt a touch on my arm. Turning, I saw one of the officials of the aerodrome.

" 'Excuse me, sir,' he said. 'Are you Dr. John Delaney?' I admitted my identity, and the man went on: 'This telegram arrived for you a few minutes ago.'

"I took the orange envelope indifferently and tore it open. Doubtless, thought I, it was yet another message of congratulation and well-wishing, similar to the dozens I had already received during the day. But as I cast my eye on the flimsy sheet inside I saw that this was a message of a totally different kind.

"My feelings must have reflected themselves on my face, for Irene hurried to my side.

" 'What is it, John?' she asked anxiously. 'Not bad news, I hope?'

"I reassured her with a laugh.

" 'Oh, it's nothing very terrible,' I said lightly, 'but, at the same time, it is news which is not likely to cause rejoicing to a newly married man.' I drew her a little aside and hurriedly explained the situation.

"The telegram had been sent by Sir Charles Anstruther, the well-known surgeon, who had kindly consented to act as my *locum tenens* during my absence from England. One of my patients, a prominent public man whose name is—or was at that time—almost a household word, was lying in a critical condition. He was suffering from an obscure organic disease of which I had made an exhaustive study, and on which I was an acknowledged authority. An immediate operation was vitally necessary—an operation which I alone could perform with any chance of its proving successful. He

hated to recall me from my honeymoon, but felt it his duty to place the facts before me. Time was precious; would I wire an immediate reply?

"Irene was regarding me wistfully when I reached the end of my hurried explanation.

" 'Is it absolutely necessary that you go back?' she asked.

" 'It is a matter of life and death,' I told her gently.

" 'Then you must not let our great happiness keep you from your duty,' she said firmly. 'We will return to London together.'

"But this I would not hear of. Why should she forego the trip that she had looked forward to so eagerly, and remain alone during the night while I was away at the hospital? I would follow her the next morning—by special plane if necessary—and then we could carry out our plans as arranged. In the end my arguments prevailed, and she returned to her seat. Almost immediately the huge air-liner took off, and rose with a magnificent sweep in the direction of the Channel. Then, without even waiting till it had disappeared out of sight, I entered my waiting car and ordered the amazed chauffeur to return to town as quickly as possible.

"SLIGHTLY over an hour later we entered the suburbs of London, where I stopped the car at a telephone call-box and rang up Sir Charles, asking him, in turn, to apprise two eminent surgeons, whom I named, to meet me at the hospital, so that there might be no delay. When I reached my house in Harley Street he was awaiting my arrival and came forward eagerly to greet me.

" 'You have come, then?' he cried, with more surprize than I felt was called for. 'It will be a terrible ordeal for you, Delaney. Who would have anticipated such a terrible tragedy!'

"I stared at him, uncomprehending.

" 'Why, is the patient worse?' I asked.

" 'The patient?' he repeated. Suddenly his face changed. 'Is it possible that you have not heard?'

" 'Heard what?' I demanded roughly. 'What has happened to make you look at me like that?'

"By way of answer he picked up a late edition of an evening paper which lay upon the table and pointed to a small paragraph in the Stop-press News. It told, with a brevity that was almost brutal, that the air-liner in which my wife had traveled had crashed in flames within a few minutes of leaving the ground, and that every one of the passengers and crew had perished!

"I dropped the paper with a smothered groan. My mind, in those first stunning seconds, seemed benumbed—incapable of action. I could not speak—could not even arrange my thoughts coherently. Moving like a man in a dream, I crossed to the sideboard, filled a glass from the decanter standing upon it, and tossed it off as though it had been so much water. As the fiery spirit coursed through my veins, grief gave place to a burning wave of anger against the fate which had snatched my loved one from me. I burst into a torrent of words, wild, half-intelligible ravings which made Sir Charles stare and shake his head.

" 'Calm yourself, calm yourself,' he said soothingly. 'I can quite understand your feelings. Go to your room and lie down while I mix you a composing draft.'

"His words and manner pulled me up short. With a tremendous effort of will I managed to control my voice.

" 'I am quite all right,' I told him.

'Come, they will be waiting for us at the hospital.'

" 'You're surely not going to perform that operation—now—after what has occurred?' he cried, staring at me harder than ever.

" 'Why not?' I answered, with forced coolness. 'That is what I returned for.'

"Still he hesitated. 'You are quite sure that you feel equal to the strain? Hadn't you better take a little rest before——'

"I cut short his remonstrances by moving to the door, and he followed me, shaking his gray head and feebly protesting. Arrived at the hospital, we found everything in readiness, and a few minutes served for me to wash, don my white overalls, gauze mask, and rubber gloves. I nodded to the sister, the patient was wheeled in, the anesthetic administered, and the operation commenced.

"Never had I felt cooler, more confident, more certain of a successful outcome. A curious sense of aloofness and detachment pervaded me. I could almost persuade myself that I was watching someone else perform the operation; that the hands which were making the preliminary incisions with deft, practised skill had no connection with my own busy brain, filled as it was with the vision of Irene's parting smile. Instinctively, almost I may say unconsciously, yet with no hesitation and no mistake, I went on with my work; yet all the while I felt that I was but witnessing something with which I had no particular concern.

"Afterward the surgeons present bore witness that they had never seen a more masterly demonstration of surgical skill. They watched me, fascinated, entranced, as the operation swiftly drew toward its close. It was almost over—another few seconds and I would have relinquished my post to the dressers—when of a sudden a thick mist appeared to intervene between my eyes and the brilliantly lit operating-table. I hesitated—fumbled—then did a thing which no sane surgeon would have done.

"I heard the horrified exclamations from my colleagues and saw Sir Charles snatch up a swab and dart forward, while another hastily called for the oxygen cylinder in a vain effort to revive the patient. My mind reeled as I shrank back, gazing with distended eyes at the ruin I had wrought. Like a spoken accusation the full heinousness of my conduct came to me—*I had undertaken a major operation whilst my mind was befuddled with brandy!* Within two minutes the man on the operating-table was dead.

"There was no open scandal; my colleagues, remembering the nerve-racking trial I had undergone, gave me every consideration. My action was ascribed to a sudden mental breakdown—something that could not have been avoided. But all the same, from that moment my professional career was at an end. I was a marked man—a ruined man. Gradually I sank lower and lower, until, friendless and almost penniless, I reached the stage where you see me now."

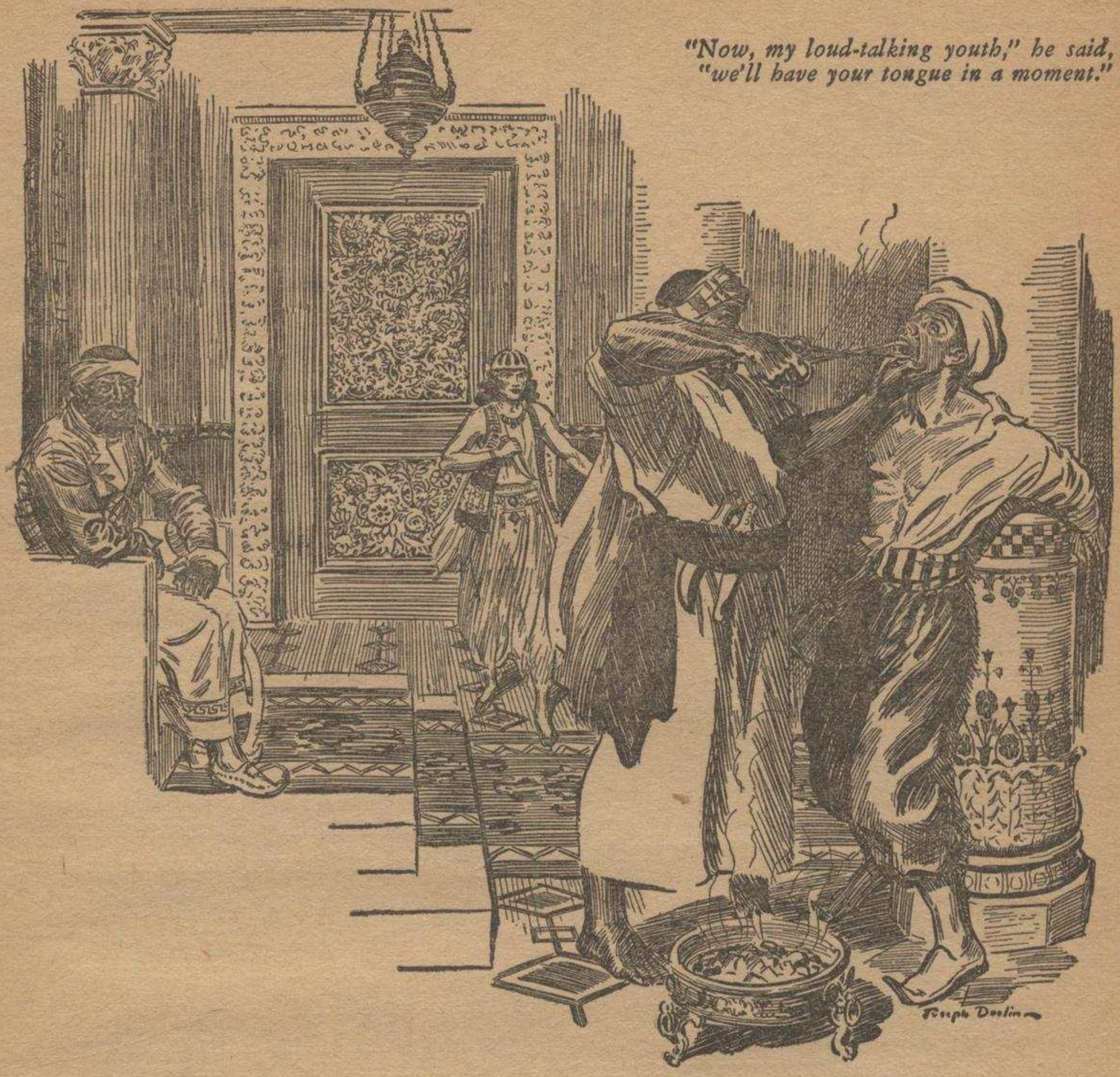
The voice died away and for a space the only sounds were our muffled footsteps and the mournful soughing of the night wind. I murmured a few words of condolence, but what are mere words, however heartfelt, in the face of a tragedy such as I had just heard? It was mainly with the object of diverting his thoughts into another channel that I asked:

"How long is it since the events you have just related took place?"

"They happened on the thirteenth of September, 1920."

"That will make it just nine years ago," I said, adding suddenly, "and almost to the very minute, too!"

*(Please turn to page 410)*



*"Now, my loud-talking youth," he said, "we'll have your tongue in a moment."*

# The Dragoman's Secret

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

THE big Nubian, who had been industriously plying his bellows during the conversation, now pulled the pincers from the brazier. Their jaws glowed white-hot as he advanced toward me with a look of fiendish delight.

Seizing the point of my jaw with his left hand, he pushed it down. I moved my head with it, keeping my mouth tightly closed, whereupon he held the hot pincers beneath the end of my nose, causing me to jerk my head back. My mouth flew open, and he inserted the pincers between my teeth, holding them apart, and searing my lips and tongue.

"Now, my loud-talking youth," he said, "we'll have your tongue in a moment."

Just at this point something very startling happened. What it was, and what became of Hamed the Attar, who tells this amazing story, will be one of the features of the Spring Issue of ORIENTAL STORIES. This, and stories by Robert E. Howard, James W. Bennett, S. B. H. Hurst, Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner, Solon K. Stewart, and others, will appear in this splendid issue. On sale April 15th. Printed by the publishers of WEIRD TALES.—Adv.

*(Continued from page 408)*

"What do you mean?" he asked with a puzzled frown.

"Tonight is the thirteenth of September."

He stopped dead in his stride as though he had been shot.

"By heaven, you're right!" he muttered hoarsely. "Strange that I should have forgotten that date of all others!"

A FEW minutes after we had resumed our tramp we came into sight of a long range of white stone buildings which glimmered wanly in the faint starlight, against their background of rolling downs. Here Delaney quitted the road and struck off across the grass, making for a structure whose general outline bore a vague resemblance to a grandstand on a race-course.

Even in the faint light I could see that the whole aerodrome had an air of dilapidation and neglect. The paint was peeling from the woodwork of the great doors of the hangars as they hung askew on their rusted hinges; some of the windows of the waiting-room were boarded up; others, with broken panes and shattered frames, allowed the wind to sweep unchecked through the bare, dismantled rooms within. We made our entry through an open door, and the sounds of our footsteps echoed hollowly on the uncarpeted boards.

Dog-tired by my long tramp, I wasted but little time in an examination of my somewhat eery sleeping-quarters. Pausing only to collect in the least drafty corner some pieces of tattered canvas that were lying about, I threw myself down on them and in a few minutes was sound asleep.

I can not say whether I slept a minute, or an hour, or several hours; all I know is that I was awakened by a hand gripping my shoulder, and sat up, wondering and still half dazed.

"What's the matter?" I demanded of Delaney, who was bending over me. He silenced me with a warning gesture.

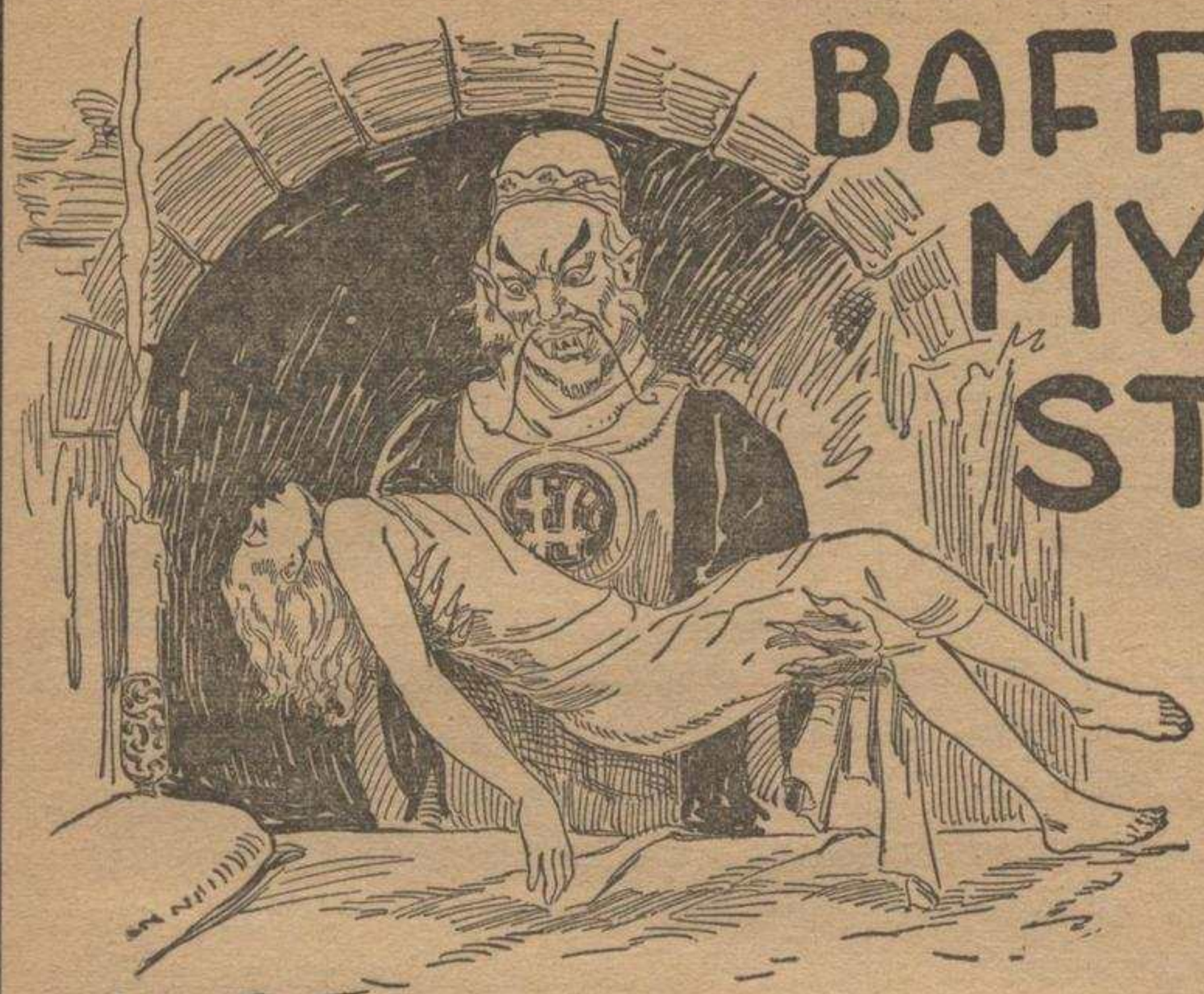
"Hush!" he said in a fierce whisper. "Listen!"

In a moment I was on my feet, fully awake now. Outside, in place of the former silence and darkness, were the glare of many lights, the sounds of voices, the noise of busy movements. I gained the window at a bound and stared forth, incredulous, aghast. Every window of the spacious building opposite blazed with lights; a little group of people, clad in overcoats and wraps, were standing on a kind of veranda before the waiting-room, watching a giant biplane being hauled out of the hangar by a squad of overalled mechanics. Officials in uniform hurried to and fro; porters were busy unloading mail-bags and luggage from a covered lorry which seemed to have just driven up. The derelict aerodrome had awakened to life!

Scarcely had I taken in the first general impression of the scene before my attention was attracted by a young, slender girl standing a little apart from the other passengers. She was pacing restlessly to and fro, her eyes glancing from side to side as she scanned each batch of new arrivals as though in search of a familiar face among them. She seemed indifferent to the other passengers; even when they had taken their seats in the plane she remained below, looking about her with ever-increasing anxiety. At last she turned her face in our direction, and simultaneously a great cry burst from the lips of John Delaney.

"Merciful God! it's Irene!" he shouted excitedly. "It's Irene—my wife—and she's waiting for me!"

Before I could realize the full mean-



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ing of his words he had dashed across the room, out of the door, and was speeding across the grass toward the waiting plane. Scarcely heeding what I did, I followed him more slowly.

I saw him run toward the girl and fold her in his arms; then, hand in hand, the two moved to the steps which led up to the cabin of the air-liner.

"You have come at last, Jack!" I heard her say as I hurried up. "You have come to me, and I am glad. I have been waiting for you so long . . . so long, darling. But I knew that you would be waiting here for me sooner or later, to come with me on the journey we planned so long, long ago."

Delaney made no answer, but his eyes were fixed on the beautiful face of the girl in a wide-eyed, hypnotized stare. Like a man who walks in his sleep, he began to mount the steps. With a warning cry I lurched forward and grasped his arm.

"What are you about to do?" I whispered urgently. "Are you mad?"

He turned on me with a snarl of fury:

"Hands off!" he cried roughly. "Can't you see the plane is ready to start, and that my bride is waiting? Hands off, I say!"

He tried to break my grip, but the desperation of terror gave me strength to hold him fast.

"You fool!" I cried. "Can't you realize that the thing you are about to enter is a phantom plane, manned by a ghostly crew, and carrying the shades of the men and women who perished when the Paris air-mail crashed in flames? Can't you see that you are being lured to your death? Turn back before it is too late!"

My frenzied appeal seemed to pierce his clouded brain. He passed his hand dazedly across his forehead and half turned away. At the sight, a low wail broke from the girl.

"Will you desert me yet again, Jack? I have waited so patiently for you, and I want you so, so much! Come with me, my love, for I want you so very much in my loneliness. Come with me! . . . Come!"

For a moment she stood, her slender figure framed in the cabin door, a wistful smile upon her lips, her two hands held down to him in tender appeal. With the strength of a madman, Delaney threw off my detaining grasp. When I again essayed to seize him he struck me full in the face, sending me prone upon the ground.

"I am coming, Irene—my own!" I heard him cry, as I lay half stunned. "I am here—here by your side! Kiss me, my lost bride whom I have found again. Come what may, I am yours this night and for ever!"

I heard the slamming of the cabin door, the thunder of the mighty engines, the drone of the propellers. I felt the rush of the backward wash of wind as the outspread wings passed over me, and pressed my body against the ground to avoid being struck; nor did I venture to raise my head until the noise had died away in the distance.

When at length I rose unsteadily to my feet and looked around, the great aerodrome was silent, ruinous and deserted, as I had first beheld it.

But seaward, high up in the southern sky, a tiny fiery star had burst forth and was swerving downward, leaving behind it a trail of blazing wreckage, as it plunged to its last resting-place beneath the waters of the distant Channel.

The Phantom Plane had made its last flight, and the living and the dead were one.

# *COMING NEXT ISSUE*



AS HE crouched there in the rushes, Tam gasped in amazement at sight of the wondrous creature that emerged from the waving jungle grass. A slender girl, panting and swaying as if from exhaustion, ran out on the bank.

Her garments were unlike anything he had ever seen or heard of. On her head was a tight-fitting golden helmet crowned with a gold disk above a silver crescent, set on a uræus with eyes that were smoldering rubies. Wisps of her dark-brown hair peeped from beneath the magnificent head-piece and in her hazel eyes was the look of one who has just escaped some unspeakable horror. Her shapely limbs and torso were encased in light, golden chain mail, reinforced by sliding shoulder plates, circular breast plates, and a jointed girdle with a skirt of taces, and adorned with glittering jewels set in strange designs. From her belt of scarlet leather hung a dagger sheath and sword scabbard, both empty.

Fascinated, Tam stared in breathless wonder and admiration. But the slight hint of a movement in the tall grass behind the girl drew his jungle-trained eyes. Something was stalking her! Then he saw the striped tip of a long tail lashing above the grass, and he knew!

He leaped up, a cry of warning on his lips, but at that moment the tiger sprang!

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*"The dagger quivered above him, and he collapsed against the hangings."*

# The Treasure of Almeria

## *By* MARIAN THORNTON

*The Spanish count directed the will of Don Carlos by hypnotic suggestion, but he pushed his mastery too far*

DON CARLOS, picking a numb way through the darkness of the cobbled streets of Antequera, did not pray. It was useless. He had tried it often, so often! And always the Call brought him back, dazed as a tranced bird, back to the serpent lying in wait. He fastened his thought stumblingly on his wedding. Tomorrow! He must hold to that!

It was hard to obey the Call; impossible to defy it. It rose in his mind teasing as the humming of insects; it sapped his strength; it dragged him in its undertow.

For a glorious year now he had been free of it, living like any other happy, well-to-do Spanish youth of this year 1600, glorying in the sunshine of a Castilian summer and the happiness of love. For a year he had tried to forget what had gone before: the *conde,* and his cursed black eyes, his thin voice, his oily words.

For a year he had known peace; and now—*now,* the night before his wedding—turmoil was claiming him again, shackling his soul, dragging him to where his guardian, the count, waited in hateful luxury. His guardian? *Dios!* his *jailer* rather! His persecutor! His torturer!

If only one could fight the Call, pitting his strength against it! Don Carlos clapped a hand to the rapier at his side, but the Call was too slippery a thing to fight, and his hand dropped helplessly. With an effort, he called to mind a picture of soft

*(Please turn to page 416)*

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(Continued from page 414)

eyes and an arch, sweet smile under a mantilla. Constance! The sweetness and fragrance of a red rose! And it was from her that the Call was taking him.

Drowsily he pondered the idea of turning and running, running, running through the winding streets. Absurd! One did not run from the Call. One hated and obeyed it, even as one had in boyhood, on that dread day of the plague, when the *conde* had crossed himself and sighed, "Ah, they have gone from this world. And they have left you to me. Now you shall be *my* son."

Night hung heavy in the air, drooping into every crack and cranny. He felt a need for resistance, but it was easier to let his drugged steps go forward, carrying the leaden body where they willed.

Thoughts wavered like drunken moths around his mind's flame, shut in behind the blank curtain of his eyes. Dully he centered attention on his feet, moving reluctantly, resistingly, but in direct line; moving toward the black velvet room where the *conde* was waiting, entrenched. Was all life a fighting and a surrender? He tried to look up at the white stars of Spain, but darkness pressed his eyeballs.

He felt himself turning, and knew he had come to the grilled iron door. His stupid feet, obedient to the Call, went up, up, up. His hand reached out against blackness to push aside folds and folds of stuff, soft, clinging, hateful.

He stood in the black velvet room. For an instant all his thoughts spun in a dizzy orbit, flaming and hissing through his mind; as they crystallized, only a great hatred was left.

The little *conde* had shrunk since the day of their parting, a year before. His parchment skin was more mummified, but his eyes shone with the same sinister light, as though all the life had flowed from the shriveled hands, from the yellow body with its jet velvet coverings, from the strange, immobile face, into those two somber pools. They were fixed on Don Carlos as, the giddiness passing, the boy came to recognize his surroundings.

With the soft melting of velvet into velvet, the *conde* arose. A green-shaded lamp on the ebony table before him, struggling in vain against the monstrous shadows of the apartment, hit at length on emeralds lurking in the folds of his suit, and struck from them malignant sparks.

"You are late, Carlos." Vaguely the count's voice hinted the smooth passage of a rapier through human flesh.

Don Carlos shuddered. "You have broken your oath," he accused.

The count raised a yellowed hand. "My son," he protested, "you speak so to one who has cared for you as a father? Must I remind you of gratitude?"

"Gratitude!" The boy choked back a hysterical laugh. "You cared for me because I was a tool! Would the plague that took my father and mother had——"

"Carlos," warned the *conde* suavely, "beware the sin of blasphemy!"

"You swore if I would recover the treasure of Teruel to release me forever. Yet tonight you have called me, snared me, forced me to come!" Carlos' voice trembled with agonized reproach.

"My son! I called you, and you would not come. Is that the act of a dutiful child? I needed you, but it has spent me to bring you here." Unctuously he bowed his head. "For that I forgive you."

"I ask no forgiveness!" Don Carlos stood erect, his eyes tragic against the pallor of his face, but his wine-red velvet a gallant note of challenge in the somber room.

The malign eyes opposite him narrowed, the voice took on a slight edge. "I

(Please turn to page 418)



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*(Continued from page 416)*

know of a treasure. Will you help me?"

The boy clenched his hands for strength against the preying glance. "No."

"You refuse unalterably?"

"I refuse."

The *conde's* thin lips twisted grimly. "Let us be frank. Without your consent I can not control your mind, for it has grown strong in this year. It tired me to bring you here tonight, and it would tax my utmost resources to use you against your will. So much you can not fail to recognize. But, Carlos, there are ways of forcing your consent."

Don Carlos stood immobile, save for a quick breath.

"You will reconsider, perhaps?" suggested the count silkily.

"I will not."

"No? Ah, it is a pity! But a dungeon, it may be, will cool that hot head. A year —two years—who knows? There is no hurry." The yellow hands rubbed together in satisfaction.

The boy cried out. "You wouldn't dare!"

"Dare? Ah, my son, my walls are protected by gold. No one would interfere."

Carlos faced him with gathering horror, like storm-clouds, in his eyes. He spread his hands. "In the name of the Saints," he implored, "have pity! You are taking back my soul when I have only now found it. Let me go, as you hope for mercy!"

"I should dislike disappointing your bride on the morrow," the count murmured sorrowfully.

Don Carlos clapped a hand to the slender dagger in his belt, then quite unexpectedly capitulated, his eyes haunted with despair. "I can't fight it," he cried. "I can't! I surrender. Do your worst."

"Ah, that is better," purred the old man. "That is my good son." He put out a hand, but Carlos drew back sharply.

"The terms of my surrender," he said coldly, "have not been settled."

"Ah?"

"An agreement, written and signed, releasing me, on your Christian honor, from any further oppression, the paper to be filed with a court of law."

The ghost of a thin, malicious smile played over the count's lips. "I shall prepare it," he agreed.

"Secondly, your written promise that three-fourths of whatever treasure we may recover be distributed among the poor as my wedding gift. The fourth part you may keep."

The *conde* assumed a mask of sorrow. "*Bueno,*" he sighed.

Carlos recognized the mask and was darkly troubled. The somber draperies seemed closing in on him, stifling him in their folds, laughing silently in the evil pleasure of their master. The count, whose greedy yellow fingers were never still, had acceded too easily.

THE count dipped a quill, and covering a white sheet with spidery writing, handed it to Don Carlos, who read it swiftly and fastened it within his doublet. In the meantime, the count brought forward an ebony chair, carved in death's-heads and serpents. Carlos had occupied it before, but its sinister lines appalled him now with a sense of foreboding.

The *conde* sat opposite, a living, yellowed death's-head, against the blackness of velvet and ebony. His emeralds spat fire as he leaned to take a manuscript from the table.

"I have here," he began softly, "the record of one Juan Castro, a soldier of Spain in the capture of Almería from

*(Please turn to page 420)*

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*(Continued from page 418)*

the Barbary pirates in the year 1589. It was a splendid surprize attack, that capture, and our Señor del Castro comments with amazement that although the action was so swift that the pirates had barely time to fly for their lives to the galleys—that although they had no opportunity to carry away the rich loot garnered up the whole coast from Murcia to Alicante—yet not a trace of it was found by the victors. *It is that treasure I want you to find.*" The count's voice hissed with greed.

Don Carlos drew a long breath, as a swimmer who is about to dive under green waters. "*Bueno,*" he consented, and yielded his mind quite passively.

At first he felt only the whirling maze of thoughts which had come to him when he entered the black velvet room. Objects spun giddily out of sight and back again in sickening succession. The shrouding velvet all about him shut out light until he gasped for it as a man under water gasps for air. Emeralds, gigantic and malignant, flashed before him in dazzling array. He saw miles of saffron yellow, wrinkled and unreal.

Then a whirling kaleidoscope of color, green, yellow, converged and gained in intensity until he wanted to cry out. It bore on his heart like a weight of stone. Black! A luminous, compelling black, in twin pools; dark morasses where his soul was drowning. Relief came in a drowsy wave, and the morasses grew vaguely pleasant with the thought that one might sleep in them and forget. He was about to plunge into them when a disturbing voice came to him. He fought it off, but it persisted, shattering his peace.

"Are you ready?"

"I am ready, master," something answered, without his having moved his lips.

"It is June of the year 1589—June the fourth. You will go back, please, to that year." The voice was no longer disturbing. It was pleasant now, droning along with grateful monotony. Even its sibilance was delicious, like the song of insects on a hot afternoon. "You are traveling back. Back to 1589. That is eleven years ago. Eleven years that you must retrace. Are you traveling back?"

"Yes, master."

He was no longer oppressed with blackness. Sunshine was covering him now with glorious warmth.

"Eleven years ago," the voice persisted. "Are you there?"

"I am there."

"*Bueno.* It is the coast of Almería, our neighbor to the east. The ocean is blue, and the sands stretch away to the purple uplands. It is a sunny morning, yes?"

"It is a day of glorious sunshine."

"On the beach a band of men are busy with great chests of gold. Can you see them?"

"Not yet, master."

"It is the beach of Almería. The ocean is blue, and a light wind has come up with the early sun. The sands are flecks of gold. Do you see it?"

"A moment. . . . Yes, I can see it."

"What else do you see?"

It was amusing, this telling what he saw. He merely stood on the beach and watched the great, hardy brown men at work. They could not see him, and he did not even have to talk. Something inside answered all the questions without effort on his part.

"Are they excited?" queried the soothing voice.

"No. They sing as they work, loud, boastful songs in a strange tongue. They are ragged, but beautiful in colors like the sunset. Out on the water four galleys are rocking at anchor."

"Do you see chests of gold?"

"Chests, and golden objects—crucifixes, censers, beads." A disturbing wave of cold swept his sun-warmed mind. Crucifixes should not be on a beach!

His pleasant illusion was shattered for a moment, and the voice jarred further, for it was higher-pitched, with an edge of excitement. He clenched his hands, and could not know that only the finger tips curled, minutely.

"Gold," the voice gloated. "Yes, yes! Is anyone coming down from the highlands?"

"No, master."

"Wait on the beach. Tell me when anything occurs."

"Yes, master."

The *conde* sat with mask off, his fingers tight-gripped around the carved ebony arms, his lips twisted with greed. "Is there any movement?"

"No—yes—yes! A horseman is coming down to the beach, swiftly. He wears the uniform of Spain. He has thrown himself from the saddle and he runs to the tallest of the brown men. He speaks in Spanish to the Barb, calling him Sakr-ed-Din. He warns him of an approaching army. He is gasping for breath. There is great excitement. The Barb turns black with fury and calls orders in a voice of thunder. The men look furiously to the uplands."

"The gold? The gold?"

"The gold is on the beach, master. Hoards of it, in great heaps, shining in the sunlight. They are about to load it in boats to take to the galleys, but the Spaniard shakes his head. He tells that swift vessels of Spain are coming also. He motions to the beach, and Sakr-ed-Din laughs a great, terrible laugh and calls out orders.

"The big men fall to digging out a hole where sand and underbrush meet.


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They carry the gold to it, object by object. They are huge men, but the weight tries them."

The count licked his thin lips.

"They finish the gold; then one approaches from behind the spy and cuts him down with a simitar. Sakr-the-Hawk nods approval, and the slayer carries the body to a hole. There it is buried with the gold, and they set fire to the underbrush to cover the spot."

"The spot!" cried the *conde*. "Mark the spot well!"

"They are marking it on a chart, master. It is near the foot of a crag which springs from the beach in the likeness of a carved face. One angle of the crag juts out beyond the rest, casting a pointed shadow. The tip of that shadow at high noon is the spot."

Feverishly the count nodded. "They never came back," he muttered.

"The brown men are in small boats, pushing off to the galleys, when the soldiers of Spain break over the crest and swoop down on them, their horses foaming and black. The battle begins——"

"You may leave the battle," the count interrupted. His sallow face, in the feeble glow of green light, contracted into a grimace of satisfied cupidity, and his fingers stroked the ebony serpents of his chair arm.

"You are in the present," he said softly. "It is the year 1600. You are still within my control. Within my control."

"Yes, master."

"In your doublet you have a paper of mine. Give it to me."

Don Carlos' lips parted slightly, his finger tips bent in a faint, miniature gesture of menace. The count fixed his terrible eyes on him. "You are in my control," he repeated distinctly, feeling the other's mind like a living being at war with his.

The boy sat rigid, motionless, almost without breath. "Give me the paper," the count insisted grimly. His eyes flamed with a destroying light.

Don Carlos made no move, but his arm muscles, under their velvet covering, rippled with the effort of restraint. The count rose and crossed to the opposite chair. "You are under my control. Under my control." Monotonously he spoke, standing like an angel of ill omen over the dark boy. Then smoothly he stooped, unfastened the doublet, and delicately extracted the paper. Don Carlos quivered when the hands touched him; quivered like an angry war-horse, curbed against his passionate will.

Trembling, the count returned to his chair. Too strong. Too strong. How a mind could grow in a year! Restively, he tore the paper across, time and again. Too strong. The dam had broken, and who could tell where the flood would lead?

DON CARLOS stirred. The coma was ending, trailing out to a fine tenuous point which would snap. And what then? The withered yellow hand beat softly on the ebony chair arm. Something to break that will! Something to shatter the mind and lay it broken at his feet. To shatter the mind?

With a guttural cry of rejoicing the *conde* sprang to his feet, his crooked shadow falling menacingly over Don Carlos like an unclean bird. "You are mad," he said quite distinctly, but with careful monotony. "Mad. Mad. Mad."

In Don Carlos' mind the words were slow drops of oil on the surging waters of revolt. Injustice rankled darkly, and the need for resistance. But the voice, flowing with friendly smoothness, lulled him and set at rest all disturbing emotion. Resistance? And why? To hear the voice droning away to some dim horizon of

consciousness, to obey it and drift with the swelling tide of drowsiness, that was peace.

Rebellion and hatred raised tiny hammers and beat against the wall of thought. He should hate the voice! Desperately he caught at the hammer blows trying to shatter peace. It was too easy to be a friend to sleep. He must fight, fight, fight, against sleep. He struck out with force that left him sobbing and weak, but sleep was too impalpable to battle. It flooded him like a wave, drowning and fleeing, dragging him in the undertow. Or *was* it sleep? Was it not more a surrender?

At least it was a gentle thing, soothing to frayed thoughts and bleeding emotions. The hammers still beat warningly, but sleep, in a vast, calm ocean, stretched before him, and with a sobbing breath of defeat he hurled himself into it.

At first the *conde* scarcely realized that the battle was won. His brain was reeling with exertion, and his hands, clenched about the chair arms, seemed of yellow marble, carved in straining veins and tendons. He was rocking slightly with the monotony of his own voice. "You are mad. Your will is crumbling. You feel the joy of surrender, the great peace of relaxing. You must not struggle. You are mad. Mad. Mad."

The heavy air of the room, weighted with blackness, seemed compressed about him by the intensity of his effort. How strong a mind could grow in a year! How strong!

But wait! He no longer felt resistance. His mind, staggering forward under the very momentum of its exertion, was unchecked. The form before him had lost its rigidity, and was drooping. As he watched, anxiety drawing back his lips in a ghoulish grin, he saw the gallant shoulders sag and the firm lines of the


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face melt almost imperceptibly into the loose contours of insanity.

He laughed, beating on the chair arms in monstrous glee, even while his brain spun with exhaustion. "No more!" he gloated. "No more. Oh, this will weaken that mind of yours! Never fear, my boy. A touch of inferno till I choose to waken you!" He leaned back, laughing weakly, shaking with weariness and gratification. "No more!"

The boy was speaking now, brief, broken sentences in a whining voice. "A merry comedy! A wedding? I know no wedding. The world is a great joke, is it not? Trees of black—black velvet. They are beating me. I could hate black velvet trees."

The count intertwined his thin fingers and twisted them.

"My master is—is gold. An image, I think. You shall not talk against my master. I hate him, but you must not. Hush!"

Cackling with breathless laughter, the *conde* closed his eyes to listen.

The whining voice answered his laughter with a mocking, high-pitched counterfeit. "A joke! My master is gold, yet he had blood like any man. And once he had a heart. Hush! You must not tell him how I love him!"

THE voice broke off abruptly and a great silence fell on the room—a silence as tenuous and melting as black velvet. The *conde* heard his own labored breathing, and with a sudden fear upon him opened his eyes.

Don Carlos stood over him, with a dagger poised above his breast. The *conde* loosed a scream and his eyes went dull with fear.

"Hush," whispered the boy. "Do not disturb my master! I love him so I would see his blood. So simple!" He motioned downward suggestively with the dagger.

The count huddled in his chair. "You must not hurt your master," he chattered shrilly.

"It will not hurt him," breathed the other gently. "He is of gold, you see." The red velvet arm, poised above, was like a streak of blood against the darkness.

The old man shuddered back. "Stop!" he shrieked. "You are not mad! You are sane! Sane!" He gasped and beat at the air with his hands, then like a hunted weasel slipped from under the raised arm and ran stumbling to the draperies. He clawed at them, fumbling for an opening, but he felt a hand on his shoulder and screamed aloud. Turning, holding to the velvet for support, he faced the expressionless eyes and shining dagger.

"About here, perhaps?" the boy mused, touching the keen point lightly above his heart.

With hysterical laughter bubbling on his lips the count summoned all his giddy faculties. The blade was rising again, in a deliberate arc at the end of a blood-red arm. Fascinatedly he followed it, but a pounding terror at his heart warned him. He tore his eyes from it, fixed them in whirling concentration on the demented eyes before him, "You are not mad!" he choked. "You—are not—in my control."

The dagger quivered above him and he collapsed against the hangings in a half-faint, waiting for the blow, his parchment face distorted with horror.

When an eternity had passed, he opened his eyes haggardly. Don Carlos stood before him, dagger in belt and the clear light of sanity shining in his eyes.

The *conde* swayed and choked for words, left numb by the brushing of the wing of death.

"You are recovered, *señor?*" inquired

Don Carlos. His face, ghastly white, was lighted by the trace of a glorious smile.

"You know, I suppose," he continued softly, "that you are wholly in my power? Even without the paper which you destroyed—a generous document, *señor*. A thousand pities you destroyed it!—even without it I have outstripped your power forever. I have found a mind of my own. I am free!" His voice was vibrant with joy.

The count found speech. "'Twas by way of experiment that I took the paper, my son," he stumbled placatingly. "I remember the wording—an instant and I will replace it. Pen—papers——" He started forward nervously.

Don Carlos motioned him back and he relapsed wordlessly against the hangings. "The document is useless, *señor*. Even without it I am free, and as to the treasure, the whole is to be delivered to the poor to celebrate my wedding. I shall not hurt you further, for I think you have suffered today."

Sweeping a clear glance over the other's haggard face and broken attitude, he straightened.

"I bid you farewell, *señor*, for the wedding must not be delayed." He bowed ironically, his diamonds catching the evil light in a gleam of pure beauty; then he turned and strode through the black velvet darkness into the full sunlight of a Spanish day.


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# Ten Million Years Ahead

*(Continued from page 319)*

We leapt out of the mixing-machine's shadow, ran on past a group of stalking-machines that rested with folded limbs and cups close to the ground, the plants in those cups sleeping. We reached the sixth pit's edge and speedily lowered the ladder into it.

Even while the ladder was still lowering, Blan and I were climbing down it. We had stepped over only the first of the white forms sprawled in sleep at the pit's bottom, when Blan uttered a fierce low exclamation, grasped one of the sleeping men and with hand close over his mouth shook him swiftly to wakefulness.

"Julla!" he was whispering to the awakened and bewildered man. "It is I, Blan—we have come for you!"

"Blan!" the other choked, strangled with amazement. "But if you are not a slave too how did you——"

"Later," Blan told him. "We have another to find, Julla—it is my brother," he added to me, his face working.

"Look!" Julla hissed to us. "One comes!"

A white form, as though attracted by our voices, had risen from the sprawled men at the pit's farther side and was coming toward us!

"If he wakes the others it's the end!" I whispered. "Jump him now before he can make an outcry!"

Even as I spoke I had leapt, with Blan and Julla with me, over the sprawled sleepers toward that advancing form. I struck the fellow, gripped him, and then as he uttered a low cry I swayed back from him.

"Norton!" I cried. "Blan, it's Norton!"

"You, Olcott!" Norton exclaimed. "Good God, you here!"

"We came after you," I whispered, and in a few words told him how Fairley and I after his capture had encountered the white men, one of whom had come with us in our search for his own brother, whom we had just found. I saw now that Norton was wearing a moss tunic like ours and those of the other slaves, which the plants had had him don when he was put into the ranks of their slaves.

"The others in this pit are all sleeping," he said. "I could not sleep, as you can imagine, and when I saw you climb down into the pit could not understand what was going on."

"Well, up out of it now!" I exclaimed. "The sooner out of this hell-spawned city the better!"

•

BLAN and Julla were already on the ladder and Norton and I climbed swiftly up after them, Fairley gripping Norton's hand excitedly when we reached the top. Not stopping to raise the ladder this time, we turned from the pit to start back toward the gate.

Across the starlit city we could see two stalking-machines moving, apparently together, near the gate, one of them being the one that had almost discovered us minutes before. Discover us they might yet when we reached the gate, we knew, for they were very near it. Keeping as much as possible in the shade of machines, our little group started at a quick run in the gate's direction.

Before we had gone a dozen yards, however, we halted as one. The two stalking-machines ahead had taken up a position between us and the gate and were motionless there, the plants in their operating-cups perhaps conversing by thought-exchange. It would be impossible for us to pass beneath them or reach the gate in any way without their sensing us.

And at any moment they might themselves find the dead plant-guards at the gate.

"Rush for it!" Fairley whispered. "We might get past them and out before they were aware of us!"

Julla shook his head. "They would have us with the great arms of those stalking-machines before ever we reached the gate!" he said.

"But we can't stay here!" Fairley exclaimed. "Any moment will see the alarm given now!"

"Look!" Norton cried. "There's our way out!"

He was pointing toward the group of resting stalking-machines beside which we had halted, stooped, giant shapes with limbs folded beneath them and plants sleeping in their operating-cups.

"In one of them we could pass the other machines without challenge, perhaps," Norton said.

"But we can't operate them!" I objected.

"I can, I'm sure," he replied. "When I was captured and brought here in one of the stalking-machines I watched their way of control and it looked simple enough. If we can capture one and get out in it, it would be easy to get back into the forest, and to our time-doubler!"

"It's our best chance!" Blan agreed. "We three with weapons will climb up first into the cup of this nearest one!"

At once Fairley and I leapt with Blan toward the nearest of the resting stalking-machines. Its cup, resting on its folded jointed limbs, was three or four times our height from the ground. Holding to the great folded metal limbs we began to clamber upward, our metal blades in our grasp.

It was a short but agonizing climb, our weapons hampering us and the smooth metal giving us little hold. We reached at last the edge of the great operating-cup and drew ourselves slowly up onto


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it. In the black soil-element that filled the cup three great plants were rooted, around the central control-levers of the great machine. All three were sleeping, tendrils closed in torpor about their trunks.

There was the dull sound of three heavy blows as our swords flashed out in slicing blows that cut the three monsters through close to their roots. Thrusting their bodies out of the cup, the tendrils still closing and unclosing in reflex movements, we helped pull up Norton and Julla into the cup. At once Norton fastened upon the control-levers.

He studied them for a moment, we waiting in an agony of suspense, and then a little doubtfully pulled one back. There was no response, but he jerked another, in a different direction. The next moment we were all sprawling upon the soil of the operating-cup as the giant limbs beneath it unfolded, hoisting the cup high into the air upon them as they straightened.

Norton, confidently now, moved a third lever and the giant limbs began swinging in huge, regular strides beneath us, as the stalking-machine we rode started into the city. He changed the lever's position and the direction of the machine's stride changed, it headed toward the gate. Crouching flat in the operating-cup, we stared ahead and saw that the two stalking-machines ahead were themselves moving toward the gate.

The cup swayed this way and that as our machine's giant steps took it forward, and we clung on as best we might. Fairley and I were peering ahead with Norton, but Blan and Julla seemed both smitten with terror as they rode thus one of the huge mechanisms of the dreaded plants. Norton guided our striding machine a little to the left as one of its steps almost took it into one of the slave-pits. And as he moved the fourth lever in the control-box experimentally, the mighty metal arms that dangled from the operating-cup straightened and moved this way and that swiftly.

Suddenly as we neared the gate we saw the two stalking-machines ahead reach the opening, stoop down over it for a moment, then straighten. There was no sound, but in the next instant there came a great rustle of movement from across the whole plant-city behind us, plants waking and unfolding their tendrils, scores of stalking-machines rising ponderously and striding crashingly over the city toward us, converging upon us rapidly!

"The alarm!" cried Blan, all attempt at concealment gone now. "They've found those we slew at the gate—the whole city is rousing!"

"We can't pass those ahead now, then!" Fairley exclaimed.

"We *can* pass them!" Norton cried. "Hold tight—we're going to smash our way through them!"

THE next moments exist in my memory now only as lightning-flashes of incredible action. Our giant machine was striding forward with increased speed toward the gate, and the two stalking-machines there, as though the plants on them had divined that we were those who had slain the guards, were striding to meet us.

I saw their huge metal arms upraised as we leapt toward them and then saw Norton working the fourth control-lever madly, our own machine's arms swinging up to meet the other! Full into one of the two great shapes we crashed, metal clashing against metal. Its arms shot forth to grasp and hold our mechanism but as Norton turned the fourth lever our own machine's arms flashed down from their upraised position to smash the operating-cup and controlling plants of the other

into crumpled metal and crushed plant-bodies!

"One of them!" Norton yelled, a mad lust of battle surging up in him.

"Behind us! The other!" I cried.

The other machine's arms were reaching forth to grasp us, and though we turned swiftly it had caught a limb of our mechanism with one arm and was reaching up with the other to pluck us from the cup! I glimpsed the plants in the cup of the other working its controls with their tendrils swiftly, and then Norton had shot up one of our own great arms to catch the free arm of the other and prevent it from reaching us! Our stalking-machine swayed with the other, locked in colossal combat as of battling giants!

"The others are coming!" Fairley cried hoarsely. "Norton——!"

The other machine loosed its grip suddenly on ours and swept both great arms toward us to smash us in our own operating-cup with a great blow. But it was the opening Norton had awaited and he sent our mechanism's arms out in a great push that struck the other machine, and sent it reeling and falling, to crash down full-length among the massed machines and plants and slave-pits.

But the scores of stalking-machines rushing with giant strides from across the whole city toward us were very near us, their own mighty arms upraised.

"Out—out of the gate!" Blan yelled.

"Out, Norton—for God's sake!"

Norton, his face wild from the battle, jammed back the second lever and our great mechanism strode toward the narrow gate. We reached it, were through it, and then we were clinging in the cup as it swayed desperately, the machine climbing the slope that led to the lichen-forest.

Behind us the plant-city was in turmoil, stalking-machines rushing across it, slaves


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awakening and shouting, a babel of strange sound. And before we had reached the crest of the slope, there were emerging from the gate after us a score of the first of our pursuers, giant gleaming shapes stalking close on our track!

"The time-doubler!" I cried. "Head straight on, Norton—it will bring us to the gully where we left the doubler!"

"But what of Blan and Julla?" he asked.

"The opening of their burrow is not far from the doubler!" I told him. "If we can reach it before these behind overtake us, we'll all have a chance!"

Our machine had reached the top of the slope by then and was crashing through the lichen-forest with mighty strides. After us came the mighty forms of our pursuers, for there could be no evasion of them in the clear starlight.

That starlight alone enabled me to guide Norton and our machine in the direction in which I knew the time-doubler lay. If we could reach it—if it had not been found or tampered with—the two thoughts beat monotonously in my brain to the rhythm of our great onward strides. Within minutes our huge steps had taken us half the distance to the time-doubler, I estimated, scores of our giant pursuers now crashing through the lichen-forest after us. We could make it—could make it——

Abruptly the strides of our stalking-machine began to lessen, to weaken!

Norton pulled frantically at its levers. "That fight with the other machines—our crash—it damaged this one!" he cried.

Before we could fully comprehend the appalling fact, the machine had stopped altogether!

Instantly Norton thrust forward the lever that caused its limbs to fold under it. And as the cup sank down onto the folded limbs, he was leaping with us out of it and to the ground. Wordlessly, spurred by the crash of pursuit behind, we ran forward through the lichen-forest.

We heard the pursuing machines come up to our deserted one, halting about it, and then spreading out and coming on again in renewed pursuit. So silent were our steps on the moss, and so crashing their huge strides, that we seemed like white ghosts fleeing from giants. And they were swiftly overtaking us now!

Blan and Julla halted suddenly, and I saw beside us the clump of lichens that hid the entrance to their burrow.

"Down here with us!" Blan cried. "You can hide until their pursuit has ended!"

"No!" Norton exclaimed. "They'll find the time-doubler and with it destroyed our last chance to get back to our own time is gone. We're going on!"

"Then we go on with you!" cried Blan and Julla together.

For a moment, despite the crashing behind us that told of the nearing pursuit, Norton, and Fairley and I with him, grasped the hands of the two men. For it was only in that wild moment that we saw, at last, that despite all the changes of ten million years, man still was man. But in the next instant we had pushed them from us, into the lichen-clump. And with that wordless farewell, before they could follow, we were gone, racing on.

HEART pounding and lungs seeming to breathe flame, I felt myself staggering as we neared the gully where our time-doubler lay. For the moment as we stumbled into it, the crashing stalking-machines but a hundred yards behind us now, my heart sank lead-like as I saw no sign of the time-doubler. But Norton half dragged me forward and then I saw it, lying at the gully's bottom as we had left it, tilted a little awry still.

We reached it, fell and sprawled inside it, as a half-dozen stalking-machines

burst into the little gully after us. I saw Norton weakly pull forth three of the plugs on the doubler's control-case, and as he did so the first of the stalking-machines reached us, towered over us a colossal gleaming shape in the starlight, great arms upraised. Then, as the arms smashed down toward us in the blow that meant annihilation, there was a click as Norton replaced the plugs, a purring hum that was instantly thunderous, and then a blackness that I knew was oblivion.

From that blackness I emerged as before, without remembrance at first of my surroundings. I was lying sprawled with the unconscious other two in the time-doubler, but it stood now not in the mosses of the gully but in a big white-lit room that was for the moment utterly strange to my eyes. Then I remembered. Norton's laboratory! I staggered to my feet, uttering inarticulate sounds.

I bent over the other two, shook them weakly. They stirred, slowly revived, stumbled up and gazed about them with the same amazement that had at first been mine. And then as Norton and Fairley took in the big workroom's apparatus-filled interior, and remembered too, we were crying out together, incoherent in our first emotions.

"We did get back!" Fairley was half weeping. "Back to our own time—our own time!"

We became aware suddenly of what a strange picture we presented, as we stumbled out of the time-doubler. The three of us standing there in the neat workroom seemed grotesque to each other's eyes. Bareheaded and dressed only in the tunics of woven moss, with Fairley and me clutching still our great metal blades—we seemed like three men from another world.

It was some time before we got back to any semblance of normality and sanity. By the clock, we found, we had been




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*NEXT ISSUE*

# Black Man and White Witch

*By* WATSON RAWKINS

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gone from the laboratory a little more than one minute. This was the time it had taken Norton to turn on the time-doubler's controls at our start. Our leap across a hundred thousand centuries, and even the hours we had spent in that world of the far future, had been compressed into that minute.

"One minute in one sense and more than ten million years in another," Norton said. "One minute—yet we lived for hours during it in the world of ten million years from now."

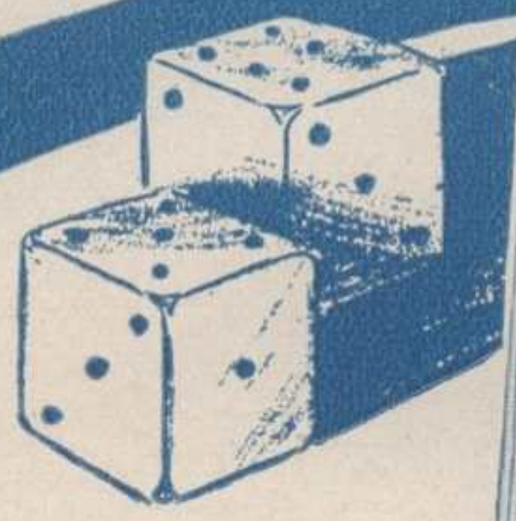
"And almost died in it, too," Fairley added.

"It will haunt me, what we saw in that world," I said somberly. "What we saw of earth's future, and man's, with all men creeping in beast-like fear of monstrous plants."

Norton shook his head. "Not all were so," he said. "Not Blan and Julla! Species rise and rule and fall again—we have seen how in that far day man will have fallen and the plants will have risen in his place to be lords of earth. But who can know what lies beyond even that far time we saw? We three will never know, for we know but too well now that to move out of one's own time is a thing forbidden, a thing terrible, and only with the time-doubler destroyed will we ever again feel easy.

"But we do know that beyond the ten million years whose culminated changes we saw, there lie other countless centuries and other changes. In that farther time the plants must fall from their lordship of earth as its other lords have fallen, and who can tell but that man will rise in their place again? Who can say but that we saw only a temporary reverse or setback in our race's progress, soon to be overcome, a mere strange episode in man's titanic upward march from the sea-slime to the stars?"

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